In the World but not of the World:
Ethos, Assessment and Professional Learning in the Christian School Context

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Education

Learning Sciences Institute Australia
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Australian Catholic University, Fitzroy, Victoria

6th June 2019

Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees.

Signed: Date: 6th June 2019

Statement of Appreciation

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the three outstanding supervisors who have ably guided me through this project. I am deeply grateful for the support that I have received and for all I have learned from these highly accomplished and generous women. Their wisdom, candour, patience, encouragement and motivation have been a greatly appreciated. I am indebted to Professor Joce Nuttall who has been on this journey with me for the entire duration, Professor Kristina Love who provided a solid foundation from the beginning and Associate Professor Lenore Adie who gave support in the last stage. My supervisors have consistently provided insightful and timely feedback, stimulated my thinking and invested in my learning. I knew from the outset that I had struck "supervisor gold".

I would sincerely like to thank my colleagues at Oasis Christian College, especially those who took part in the interview process. Their honest self-reflections and their willingness to support this project have been a great source of blessing to me. Thanks also to the school leadership for their support during the duration of my candidature.

I have been fortunate to have the support of many friends who have encouraged (and sympathised) with me along the way. I want to thank them for their understanding, for enduring my attempts to explain Bourdieu's theories and for encouraging me to keep going during the challenging times. In particular, I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Dr Daniel Pampuch, who encouraged and inspired me from the outset of this project, and cheered from the sidelines throughout. Thanks also to Tanya for your assistance with formatting.

I want to acknowledge my parents, Lenis and Felice, for all the sacrifices that they made when I was young and which enabled me to have the opportunity to become a lifelong learner.

Finally, I want to thank my wonderful husband, Jean. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made to accommodate the completion of this project and for your patience over the duration. Thank you for believing in me and for always supporting my endeavours. I am so incredibly appreciative.

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List of Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AfL	Assessment for Learning
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CPCS	Christian Parent Controlled Schools
CEN	Christian Education National (formerly CPCS)
CSA	Christian Schools Australia
MCEEDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SASC	Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education

Abstract

This research examined how professional learning could support Christian school teachers as they seek to apply their school's espoused Christian ethos to aspects of school life and practice, and, in particular, to their assessment practice. The translation of Christian ethos from a set of aspirational goals, statements, policies and even personal beliefs into the everyday practices of teachers can be challenging. This is particularly so given that Christian schools and their teachers are required to operate within the context of the broader education field that is driven by worldviews and philosophies that are often in conflict with Christian ethos.

The purposes and practices of assessment are currently rigorously debated in the education field and present a particular challenge within the Christian school context. Christian school teachers are required to work within a system that privileges high stakes assessment practices that are built on politically and economically driven purposes. At the same time, these teachers have a biblically driven goal for the holistic development of each child and a desire for each student to foster 'Christlike' attributes. This research explored how the teachers perceived this dichotomous relationship and how professional learning might support them to operate within the 'system' whilst at the same time remaining faithful to their school's vision of "integrating the gospel into all they do".

This study was located within a qualitative paradigm and used case study methodology. The case study site was my own workplace, positioning me as an 'insider' researcher. The key data collection strategy was individual, semi-structured interviews with 13 teachers. Additionally, data analysed in this study included the school's official documents, which provided insights into the school's espoused Christian ethos, as well as notes and artefacts collected from school-based teacher professional learning sessions in which all teachers participated. Findings emerged through a sequential and iterative approach to data analysis that utilised Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of field, habitus and capital as a background theory through which to draw out both the perspectives of the participants and institutional assumptions, and also conceptually to understand, analyse and explain the data collected in this study.

The findings of this research show that teachers experience the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practice as one of tension. The key reasons for this were pressure

imposed by the broader education system, parent expectations and the fact that teachers themselves are habituated into the conventions and practices of the education system and rarely question it.

The findings recognised that the first step in addressing this tension is to create opportunity for teachers to be able to identify and acknowledge it. Underpinning philosophies and conceptions of assessment then need to be challenged and reconsidered and, finally, new approaches, practices and resources developed. The teachers in this study affirmed the literature by identifying that professional learning practices that would support them in this process need to be clearly focused, differentiated, collaborative, sustained over time and enable teachers to work together to develop new strategies, concrete resources, structures and models which would support them to better align Christian ethos and assessment practices.

This thesis contributes to the field of Christian education in three key ways. First, utilising Bourdieu's tools as background theory, this study provides a new way of conceptualising an aspect of potential mission-practice misalignment within Christian schooling. Second, it provides insights into how Christian schools might utilise professional learning strategies to effectively analyse and critique the worldview assumptions of prevailing assessment practices and address existing binaries between faith and learning. Third, it highlights the role that the teachers' own habitus has in shaping practice along with ways that schools might intentionally foster the development of teachers' faith habitus.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Chapter

Teachers in Christian schools face the dilemma of trying to balance the tension of being "in the world" but "not of the world" (John 15:19, 17:16-19, New International Version). In other words, Christian school teachers have to find a way to work within a broader system of education that is underpinned by philosophies and values which often contradict their Christian ethos. This study seeks to explore how professional learning might support teachers as they seek to operate between these two 'worlds'. One specific area where this tension exists is in the practice of assessment. This research explored how teachers in one Christian school describe this tension along with the ways in which they perceive that professional learning might support them in ensuring that the school's espoused Christian ethos is realised in their assessment practice. In doing so, the study provides new ways for thinking about how professional learning can support the application of Christian ethos into assessment practice in the Christian school context.

This chapter commences by providing a background for the study, outlining the research problem and introducing the key research questions. Section 1.5 then begins the description of the context for the study by first providing an overview of the Christian school sector in Australia. This section describes the foundational goals and ethos of Christian schooling so that these can then be juxtaposed against the key literature regarding assessment, thus highlighting potential tensions. Section 1.6 looks at the history of assessment and its driving purposes through to the key contemporary debates. This section culminates in a review of the literature in relation to Christian ethos and assessment thus establishing and justifying why assessment practice was chosen as the focus for this study and why the development of a new model for conceptualising the problematic and developing professional learning solutions is significant. The chapter concludes with a summary of the significance of the research and an outline of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the Study

This research was born out of a personal passion to ensure that Christian schools are effectively training, equipping and supporting teachers in order to fulfil their mission of successfully preparing students for a life of biblical flourishing. Throughout my career as an educator, I have participated in hundreds, and possibly thousands, of hours of professional development activities. I have no trouble recalling many excellent workshops and conferences that I have attended. However, I struggle to think of many which I could say had

unequivocally had a direct impact on or changed my teaching practice. How is it that all of that time and all of that money had such little real impact? This question, along with a general frustration with the professional learning opportunities available to me, sparked an interest in understanding more about what kind of professional learning would actually support teachers, particularly those within the Christian school context in which I was working.

Through my own role as a practicing educational leader in a Christian school and my own professional reading, I also became increasingly aware of a potential area of mission-practice misalignment within the Christian schooling sector in relation to assessment practices. I then realised that, despite my 30 years working in the Christian schools, this was an area that had rarely, if ever, been discussed or addressed in professional learning activities. This therefore became a powerful unit for further investigation and analysis through this study. This qualitative case study was conducted in the school in which I work as an executive leader, Oasis Christian College. The name of the school used in this thesis is a pseudonym in an attempt to de-identify the site and its participants. Considerations around my position an insider researcher in this study are discussed fully in section 4.4.

1.3 Oasis Christian College

Oasis Christian College is a Christian co-educational school serving 1400 students from Early Learning to Year 12. The vision of Oasis Christian College is "to be a leading provider of quality Christian education delivered by Christian staff, ensuring the gospel message is an integral part of all we do" (Oasis Christian College Vision Statement). The College vision is underpinned by clear Protestant evangelical Christian beliefs based on the Bible. These are clearly articulated in its Statement of Faith, Philosophy Statement and on its website. These Christian beliefs give rise to a vision that views the core mission of Christian education "to develop within each student the desire and ability to fulfil God's will in their lives" (Oasis Christian College Mission Statement) and to do so in partnership with parents and in conjunction with the church. At Oasis Christian College, education is seen as a holistic endeavour, it is not just about academic development but also social, emotional, physical and, importantly, spiritual development. Examples of how this is expressed in relation to specific school practices will be further expanded upon throughout this thesis. The following sections of this chapter provide an overview of Christian schooling in Australia. Oasis Christian College would be viewed as a typical Christian school within this wider context of Christian education. It shares a common history, the same underpinning philosophy and indeed many of the same practices as the Christian schools with which it is associated.

1.4 The Research Problem

Christian schools profess a strong commitment to their underpinning and distinct Christian ethos. The vast majority of Christian school vision, mission or philosophical statements refer to "educating the whole child" (Christian Schools Australia, 2018a; Flinders Christian Community College, 2014) and an aim to provide families with "the opportunity to have their children educated from a *Christ-centred, Biblical perspective* that prepares them for effective service within society" (Waverley Christian College, 2015). In my experience, this Christian ethos, which is generally expressed very clearly within the core documents of a Christian school, is also shared by the staff who, largely, are personally committed to it. However, translating this ethos from a set of documented, aspirational goals, statements, policies and even personal beliefs into the everyday practices of teachers can be more challenging and certainly a lot less clear. This research is interested in this relationship between espoused and enacted beliefs and how teachers experience and navigate this.

Throughout the relatively short history of Christian schooling in Australia, models and frameworks have been put forward as tools to assist teachers in integrating Christian ethos and Christian worldview into their teaching practice. In addition, much investment has been made to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers which would support them to do so. However, the focus has predominantly been on curriculum content and has given very little attention, if any, to assessment of this content or assessment practices in general. For example, in a study by Dickens (2013) which explored the integration of Christian faith with the educational process in Christian Education National (CEN) and Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation (SASC) schools, it was found that "CEN schools appear to be more concerned with a Christian perspective through curriculum than in emphasising a pedagogy derived from a biblical understanding" (p. 247). As a consequence, assessment practices (both what is assessed and the way it is assessed) in Christian schools are at risk of failing to reflect the ethos which the schools espouse. At worst, they could even be in danger of being in opposition to the espoused Christian ethos and underpinning philosophy of Christian education. A challenge for Christian schools is to find a way to navigate between the underlying worldviews and philosophies of government-mandated policies and structures, parent expectations, teachers' own beliefs and Christian school ethos and values, particularly in relation to assessment. This challenge raised a key question for the study regarding the kind of professional learning that would support teachers to navigate the multiple influences on assessment practice while maintaining a focus on the Christian ethos of the school.

The purpose of this research was to shed light on this potential problematic by exploring the perspectives of teachers in one Christian school. If the professed Christian ethos of the school truly exists beyond published documents, policies and rituals, it resides within the individual staff members themselves: their beliefs, attitudes, dispositions and ways of looking at the world. However, teachers also operate within the broader education field and it is this relationship between the teachers' individual attitudes and dispositions and the structures of the broader education field that combine to form practice. In order to understand how a Christian ethos might influence and be reflected in assessment practice in the Christian school context, this study investigated teacher beliefs and attitudes, the influences shaping these teacher attitudes and dispositions as well as how Christian ethos is understood and experienced by individual teachers, what elements of it are shared in common with other teachers within the school and how teachers might be best supported to 'mobilise' it in both their teaching and professional learning practices.

1.5 Specific Research Questions

The research questions that focused the research design were:

1. How do teachers in one Christian school describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?

2. How do teachers in one Christian school perceive the value of various forms of professional learning in supporting them to navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices?

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990b), particularly his analytic tools of field, habitus and capital provide the background theory for this study. These tools, which will be further outlined in Chapter 3, offer a means with which to examine influences that shape the beliefs and practices of teachers and to understand the nature of tensions that occur within the education field. The teachers at the case study site are situated within an institution in a sub-field of social activity, Christian education, which is turn situated within the larger field of education. They enter this field with "systems of durable and transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72), or habitus, which impact on and are influenced by what takes place within the field. What takes place within the field is driven by what is seen to be of value, that is, the forms of capital. Bourdieu describes fields as social spaces or arenas where agents

struggle over various forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In particular, this study seeks to explore the nature of that struggle at one Christian school to understand how the habitus' of individual teachers influence their experiences of applying Christian ethos to assessment practices and to investigate how they perceive that professional learning might support them in doing so.

1.6 Christian Schooling in Australia

In this section, I present a brief history of the Christian school sector and provide an overview of the role of the Christian school associations. Importantly, I define Christian ethos as it applies to this study and highlight some of the aspirational characteristics of Christian schools. The final part of this section draws attention to the limited amount of research into Australian Christian schools thus emphasising the importance of this study.

The Christian schools sector is a somewhat new phenomenon in Australia that commenced with the opening of Calvin Christian School in Kingston, Tasmania in 1962. Etherington (2008) characterises these schools as affordable, local and faith-based (p. 112). In his analysis of the early history of the Christian schools movement in Australia, Long (1996) describes these schools as a new kind of conservative, low-fee, Protestant, private school (1996, p. 7). He goes on to say that they wish to be more distinctively Christian than the older more traditional Christian schools and that evangelical churches, notably the Baptists, Church of Christ, Reformed Church of Australia and Pentecostal Churches often sponsor them. Following humble beginnings in the 1960s in Tasmania, the period of most rapid growth of the new Christian schools was from the mid-1970s until the late 1980s. During that time schools, such as these new Christian schools, which sought to serve Australia's lower to middle classes, were greatly strengthened through the provision of federal aid for non-government schooling (Campbell, 2005).

Key motivations for the original establishment of the new Christian schools in Australia were, firstly, a clear desire on the part of parents that their children would be trained under the same values system and in the same culture as their home and church. A second was to establish a Bible-based, Christ-centred curriculum which would ensure not just the inclusion of a subject called 'Christian Studies' but rather that every subject taught and every policy would be Bible-based and Christ-centred (Edlin, 1999). In his identification of the aims of Christian schooling, Knight (2007, p. 216) provides a clear summary of the purpose of Christian schooling. He cites the primary aim as "leading young people into a saving relationship with

Jesus Christ". This is supported by the secondary aim of "character development" which includes; the development of a Christian mind, the development of social responsibility, the development of physical, spiritual and emotional health and development for the world of work. The ultimate goal or outcome is "service to both God and other people for the here and hereafter". Christian schools would assert that they meet the objectives of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4) by playing a "vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians".

Long's (1996) study reports that early criticisms of the new Christian schools included separatism, superficiality, fundamentalism and a banal engagement with pedagogy. There is probably some truth in the assertion that, in the early days, some of the schools may have put more emphasis on the 'Christian' than they did on the 'education'. However, according to Twelves (2005), Christian schools have matured a great deal in the time since Long's research and now depict a "more confident, progressive and outward looking tradition" (Twelves, 2005, p. 1).

Whilst Twelves' observations about the maturity of Christian schooling may well be true on some levels, there do exist questions as to how this conclusion is drawn. Twelves defines the measure of success for Christian schools as "the extent to which the schools' stated aims and objectives have been achieved" (Twelves, 2005, p. 60) across several areas including academic achievements, spiritual development and citizenship. However, Twelves concedes that there is sparse evidence of schools, especially in the Australian school context, actually measuring the fullness of these aims. His own thesis, which attempted to measure the success of one Christian school, relied heavily on state and national measures of academic outcomes via high stakes testing (Victorian Certificate of Education results) as a key measure of Christian school success. This tendency of Christian schools to evaluate their success according to such narrow measures, rather than the holistic development of each child, highlights the need for further studies, such as this one, which encourage Christian schools to adopt a critical posture towards their place as institutions 'in' but not 'of' the world.

1.7 Christian School Associations

As Christian schools strive to achieve their mission of integrating Christian ethos into all practices, it is worth considering the role that Christian school associations might play in supporting them. One of the key influences on the development of the Christian schools

sector has been the role of the Christian school associations. The new Christian schools are a specific subgroup of the independent schools sector and are generally distinguishable from other denominational church schools by their membership of one of two national bodies - Christian Schools Australia (CSA) representing 135 affiliated school campuses in Australia and Christian Education National (CEN) who represent 65 schools throughout Australia. There are also a further 29 Queensland schools which are represented by the Associated Christian Schools (ACS) and a number of schools which are not members of an association. A separate association, the Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS), exists specifically to provide political advocacy for Christian schools. This organisation represents a number of schools across Australia, in particular the CEN schools and schools not aligned with any of the other associations.

A core reason for the formation of these associations and why schools choose to join them has been to ensure, through mutual support and accountability, that the integrity and mission of the Christian schools movement is maintained (Christian Schools Australia, 2018b). These organisations have sought to ensure that their member schools are supported in all aspects of their operations including governance, pedagogy, curriculum and policies – all nuanced by the overall goals and mission of Christian schooling. They have played a key role in providing professional development on a range of levels including facilitating networks and conferences, providing various educational resources and, in partnership, establishing tertiary courses to offer formal postgraduate studies in various aspects of Christian education. Given that the professional learning of teachers in Christian schools has been central to the core business of these associations, this study provides important insights that can guide their approaches to professional learning provision as well as how they might work towards the development of new models, resources and metrics as they seek to support member schools.

1.8 Christian School Ethos

As this study seeks to explore how professional learning might support teachers in the application of Christian ethos to assessment practices, it is important to discuss the notion of ethos and how it is both formed and recognised in the Christian school context. This understanding is crucial in order to understand how any gaps between espoused ethos and lived practice might be bridged.

It has been argued that the concept of ethos is difficult to both define and analyse (Allder, 1993; Donnelly, 2000; McLaughlin, 2005) with the term often used interchangeably with

other terms such as climate and culture (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Solvason (2005) argues that ethos in the school context is the product of the culture of the school stating that whereas school culture is a "tangible entity", ethos is far more "nebulous" and vague (Solvason, 2005, p. 87). In a similar vein, Glover and Coleman (2005) argue that the term ethos is often used in reference to less measurable aspects of the atmosphere of a school, ultimately defining it as "the more subjective values and principles underpinning policy and practice" (Glover & Coleman, 2005, p. 266).

McLaughlin (2005) and Smith (2003) agree that there are parallels between the notion of an 'ethos' and Bourdieu's conception of habitus. As will be further outlined in Chapter 3, Bourdieu's habitus can be defined as a system of embodied dispositions, deeply ingrained habits, skills and tendencies that frame the ways in which individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it. Smith (2003) concludes that whilst it is unclear whether Bourdieu intended for the concept of habitus to be applied to organisations, "there is little doubt that, like habitus, ethos is also a 'system of durable dispositions'" (Smith, 2003, p. 467). He suggests that, similar to habitus, ethos is constructed "through an interaction between the culture mix of teachers, pupils, parents, the local community and so on, and the school's official value system, and is mediated through organisational structures and processes, and also by staff culture, climate and competence" (Smith, 2003, pp. 465-466). In other words, he sees ethos as something much more than the 'official' espoused values system but rather as a 'structuring structure' which shapes and is shaped by individuals within a field:

> On the one side it is a relation of *conditioning*: the field structure of the habitus… On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or *cognitive construction*. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world (Bourdieu & Wacquant as quoted in Grenfell, 2014, p. 51)

Donnelly (2000, p. 135) suggests that there are "two camps of definition" regarding ethos. First, she describes a positivist definition where ethos is seen as the "formal expression of the authorities' aims and objectives for the organisation". In this view it is the organisational ethos which has the power to "condition" people's behaviour. On the other hand, she posits what she describes as an anti-positivist view where ethos is seen as something which "emanates from individual and group interaction and…is a process of social interaction" (Donnelly, 2000, p. 136). In an attempt to provide a framework in which the ethos of an educational organisation can be understood, Smith (2003) also contends that ethos is an outcome of at least two elements:

> The school's mix of pupils and the values, attitudes and behaviours they bring to the school; and formal expressions of the authorities' aims and objectives expressed formally, through the curriculum and through the management and organisational processes provided by the authorities both within and beyond the school (Smith, 2003, p. 468)

Given that ethos describes the interplay between the formal expression of the school's aims and the social interaction of individuals, there exists the potential for a tension or gap between a school's official intended or aspirational expression of its ethos and the lived reality of ethos in the school context. Donnelly's (2000) study, which looked at the relationship between the official school ethos and the ethos which emerges from social interaction, found that the 'aspirational ethos' of the participating schools "was not only in some cases far removed from the lived reality of ethos but was being undermined and distorted by the actions and attitudes of school members" (Donnelly, 2000, p. 150).

In exploring the notion of ethos as it is used in the context of teaching and schooling, McLaughlin (2005) notes that a number of systems in the United Kingdom (including faith schools) have identified aspects and indicators of ethos. These include, "symbols/icons/emblems, rituals and ceremonies, communication systems and relationships with parents" (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 309). In writing more specifically about Christian school ethos in the context of Church of England schools, Jelfs (2013) suggests that:

> One aspect of ethos relates to the specific denominational characteristics of the Christian tradition; and reflected in patterns of worship, prayer and celebration of the liturgical year. The other aspect of ethos is patterns of moral action and particular values and virtues; guidelines about how to live together—justified by the vision. (pp. 55-56)

In a study that investigated the value of Christian ethos schooling for secular students, Pike (2011) outlined how Christian school leaders defined the ways in which their Christian ethos is enacted. The participants referred to valuing each person, promoting the pursuit of personal best, loving one another as oneself, service, respect and humility (Pike, 2011, p. 143). He also noted that the schools in his study promoted a clear set of core values which underpinned their moral and character education and that these values were clearly inspired by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

At Oasis Christian College the ethos, which arises out of religious beliefs, is embedded in the espoused and 'intentional' goals of the school. Core values and beliefs, which are underpinned by biblical worldview, are evident in the key documents and official discourse of the College. (These will be further described in Chapters 5 and 6). A key aim of this study was to explore the way in which this official ethos is experienced by teachers, particularly in relation to their assessment practices. Furthermore, the study investigated ways to bridge any gaps between intended and experienced ethos.

1.9 Community in the Christian School

At the heart of the Christian school (and indeed the Christian faith) is the desire for supportive and authentic relationship and community (Van Brummelen, 2009). This is a significant element of the Christian school ethos and is particularly pertinent in this study which explores professional learning practices which might best support Christian school teachers. It is also relevant because, as will be discussed in section 1.6, this priority for biblical community exists alongside assessment practices that promote individualism and competition.

Stemming from a biblical mandate, one of the key aims of Christian education is for students, teachers and support staff within the Christian school to build a culture that, amongst other things, values and promotes shalom (peace between people, each other and God and a general sense of spiritual completeness), purposeful learning, a service-oriented focus and collaborative team work.

> Effective [Christian] schools are much more than collections of individuals going about their own tasks. Rather, they are communities for learning. They share with those in need, are faithful in prayer, and live in harmony with one another (Romans 12). They commit themselves to making learning purposeful and effective for all. Teachers and students appreciate one another's gifts and allow them to flourish. They encourage their use and development for service. (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 228)

An integral part of the Christian school community is the notion that the different facets of life need to be developed in unison. In other words, faith and spirituality should not be seen as separated from knowledge and academic learning. The vast majority of Christian school mission or philosophical statements refer to a focus on educating the whole child: academically, socially, physically, emotionally and spiritually (Christian Schools Australia, 2018a; Flinders Christian Community College, 2014). This sense of the spiritual is one of the

key foci of Christian schooling. In recent years, educators outside of faith-based schooling are again considering the importance of spirituality (Anderson, 2004; Garner, 2007). However, for them, spirituality is often defined in a way that is inadequate in the eyes of Christian educators. For example, Garner defines the spirit as the "life force that creates, learns, changes" (p. 137) and that teachers should enable opportunities for students to, "reflect on personal values, beliefs, and feelings about spiritual matters" (Garner, 2007, pp. 146-147). This describes a spirituality in which God may or may not have a place. Alternatively, Parker describes spirituality as "the eternal yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos" (Palmer, 2003, p. 377).

Spirituality in the Christian school context is specific in that it is borne out of a biblically informed faith in God. Devotional times and Bible study sit alongside academic learning to contribute to a total learning experience designed, not only to help foster Christian community, but also to help students understand their place in God's story (Van Brummelen, 2009). Opportunities for staff and students to express faith and spirituality through times of corporate worship and reflection also serve to strengthen community.

One term used to describe the type of community that Christian schools aspire to create is "covenant community" (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993, p. 108). A covenant community is one that recognises their unity in Christ and therefore their deep commitment to supporting and serving one another. As members of a Christian school community go about their daily endeavours there is a goal for faith, knowledge and action to combine in a way that creates an environment that fosters the holistic growth of all members. It could therefore be expected that teachers within a Christian school would place a very high value on collaborative learning both for students and for teachers.

The biblical imperative to work together for the common good and in service of others is very clear (John 3:16). Within the Christian school ethos it is, in fact, impossible to achieve school goals unless norms and values are shared and each staff member has a strong commitment to one other. This has implications for the way in which the professional learning of staff is approached, adding extra priority to collaboration.

In my experience in Christian schools, the sense of faith based collegiality is generally evident and the shared understanding of mission and purpose clear. However, support is needed to ensure that this also extends to the manner in which teachers approach their learning and

development and their pedagogical practice. In other words, whilst the concept of faith community is strong and clearly outworked, this does not automatically ensure that the school is operating as a *professional learning* community as defined by the literature. In my experience it seems that we often still face the same challenges that existed twenty years ago in that, "There is simply not enough opportunity and not enough encouragement for teachers to work together, learn from each other, and improve their expertise as a community" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 5). The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences and perspectives of teachers within the context of one Christian school in order to enhance their professional learning experiences.

1.10 Research in Australian Christian schools

To date, it appears that research into Christian schools or Christian school associations in Australia has been somewhat limited. Apart from Long's (1996) research which investigated the development of Christian schools in Australia, only 13 other notable doctoral studies have been conducted on the movement since its inception in 1962.

King's (2005) study is the only one which related specifically to professional learning; it explored the perspectives of stakeholders in one Christian school concerning the professional development needs of its teachers. A small number of studies have highlighted dichotomies between vision and practice (Justins, 2002; Long, 1996; Prior, 2017), however, none of the studies have focused specifically on how professional learning might support in navigating these dichotomies. Neither have they explored issues related to the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices.

1.11 Assessment as a Site of Struggle

The purpose of this study was to explore how professional learning can support Christian school teachers as they seek to ensure that Christian ethos authentically undergirds all Christian school practices, particularly in light of the influence and pressure from the broader education field. In order to ensure the manageability of the study, one area of practice needed to be chosen as the focal point. My own experience working in the Christian school sector has made me aware of the lack of attention given to the application of Christian ethos to assessment practices, a factor also supported by a deficiency in research literature. This raised the question of whether assessment practices in Christian schools may go largely unquestioned. Furthermore, if this is the case, it would highlight a potential area of mission-practice misalignment to be addressed by the Christian school sector. In addition, given that

the purposes and practices of assessment are now also being debated and questioned more broadly within the education field, there emerged a compelling case for it to be the focus of this study. This section of the thesis provides a brief overview of key literature in relation to assessment in order to provide context for this study. An understanding of the history, key contemporary debates and the literature which addresses Christian ethos and assessment is crucial to framing both the findings of this study and the implications for the Christian school sector.

It is important that a discussion of assessment commences with a clear definition.

> Whatever noun you choose, assessment, exhibitions, portfolios, or just plain test, they all rest on the same basic technology, that is, you enlist a small sample of behaviour from a larger domain of interest, such as algebra or aptitude, to make inferences about the person's probable performance relative to the domain, and on the basis of the inference, you classify, describe, or make decisions about individuals or institutions. (Madaus, as cited in Broadfoot, 2007, p. 5)

More simply put, assessment can be described as the "process of firstly gathering evidence and secondly interpreting that evidence in the light of some defined criterion in order to form a judgment" (Harlen as cited in Broadfoot, 2007, p. 4).

Assessment is by no means a recent phenomenon. It is generally agreed that imperial China introduced the first systematic assessment system in order to select applicants for civil service appointments (Broadfoot, 2007; Min & Xiuwen, 2001).

> In the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), an examination called the 'annual examination' was held once a year. This examination system was quite strict, aimed at controlling the learners' ideology and supervising their learning. Only the students of the Great Learning who had passed the examination could be given a post. The examination methods included oral and written tests. (Min & Xiuwen, 2001, p. 5)

Indeed, throughout history, we can trace the use of assessment: competitions between students in the Roman world, vocational assessments employed by craft guilds during the Middle Ages, the move from oral to written examinations in the Anglo-Saxon world, through to the use of standardised tests in the twentieth century (Broadfoot, 2007; Delandshere, 2001; Goldstein & Sutherland, 2001).

In more recent history, there has been much debate around the purposes and practices of school assessment with some writers arguing that these debates are underpinned by tensions

around the nature of schooling itself. Earl (2005) argues that at the core of the tensions around assessment is a lack of clarity around the purpose of schooling. “Schools and districts are caught up in an era with the contradictory purposes of “education for all” and “education as gatekeeper” with control on the nature of goals and rewards” (Earl, 2005, p. 5). On the one hand, modern day schools are recognised for their capacity to maximise opportunities for all students and yet, on the other hand, the practices of previous eras remain and see schools required to sort and sift students through high stakes testing practices. This ultimately results in conflicting demands on teachers as they navigate the tensions inherent in negotiating and enacting contradictory purposes and practices.

Bourdieu (1990) and others have analysed schools and their associated assessment practices as systems which serve to reproduce and distribute economic and cultural capital in order to reproduce and maintain the social order. Indeed schooling, and assessment practices in particular, need to be considered in terms of their underpinning philosophical stances and their role as part of the broader social and cultural systems in which they are embedded and from which they draw meaning. Baird et al. (2017, p. 322) argue that “the curriculum itself arises from the broader context of society and culture, including values”, and that, in turn, assessment also reflects society’s values. Assessment practices impact the broader cultural beliefs and vice versa and “thus, aspects of culture, of which assessment is a part, exert their influence not just through structural entailments such as educational policies but also through enduring beliefs about how people know and what is legitimated and valued as knowing in society” (Elwood & Murphy, 2015, p. 184).

In order to provide relevant background to this study, this section focuses on the key contemporary assessment practices, philosophies and debates that have developed as a result of the introduction of universal, compulsory, school education from the nineteenth century. In Chapter 3, assessment principles and practices will be discussed specifically in the light of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework.

1.12 Assessment: An Historical Perspective

In order to fully appreciate the contemporary debates and the calls for a re-evaluation of the purposes for education, schooling and assessment, it is important to consider the historical phases that background the issues. These include industrialisation and universal schooling from the turn of the nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century and the rise of the middle class and capitalism (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012).

During the industrial era, the sorting, sifting and certification of students through assessment practices served economic and political purposes. Selection tests and school examinations were used to identify and select small numbers of students for access to secondary and university education (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Torrance, 2015). Assessments made it possible to identify those who were most capable to "advance the new economic and political order" and gave birth to "an ethic of individual ambition and achievement with the related notion of success, which also inevitably defined failure" (Delandshere, 2001, pp. 117-118). Assessment practices served to validate and reproduce certain forms of knowledge or ideas at the expense of others, thus marginalising those who were unable to experience 'success' within this system.

Earl (2005) describes 'factory' schools where:

> Kindergarten-sized units of raw material are put onto the first bench of the "plant' and sequentially moved through the "stations" (grades) on the assembly line. They spend a fixed amount of time at each one (a school year). If, at the end of the allotted time, they aren't "done", they are sorted into "streams" or "tracks" and moved to other parts of the building. (Earl, 2005, p. 1)

Success on final exams was the golden ticket for further education and only a select few would take this path. The majority of young people did not require further education and would find their place labouring in agriculture, manufacturing, mining and other unskilled work. In this factory model, test scores determined a person's role in society and teachers were seen as the quality control agents who decided each student's pathway.

The rise of the middle class and capitalism in the mid nineteenth century brought new pressure for greater equity in society and a push for access to further education being based on ability rather than social status (Earl, 2005). A significant development at this time was the new "scientific and objective mechanisms for measuring student achievement" (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, p. 68). The introduction of psychometric testing and the belief that an individual's inherent intelligence could be objectively measured, gave rise to the notion that intelligence was "innate, fixed, measurable and capable of prediction" and that IQ tests could measure an "*individual's actual ability to learn*" (Broadfoot, 2007, p. 21 italics in original). The scientific respectability of these tests made them difficult to challenge and thus was born the divide between the notions of 'objective' standardised testing and 'subjective' teacher judgement.

During the twentieth century, examinations and tests, created externally to schools, became the instruments that determined educational opportunity. However, the 'objectivity' and validity of these scientific assessment instruments have been widely debated over the past 50 years (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Broadfoot, 2007; Ingenkamp, 1977; Nuttall, 1987). These testing regimes have, over time, become more predominant and more powerful across the educational landscape, "based on arguments that such programmes provide reliable information on student performance, assist in the maintenance of academic standards, and identify and support students not meeting those standards" (Phelps in Polesel, Rice, & Dulfer, 2013, p. 640). However, high stakes testing is not without its critics (Baird et al., 2017; Berliner, 2011; Broadfoot & Black, 2004; Delandshere, 2001; Elwood & Murphy, 2015; Fleer, 2015; Harlen, Gipps, Broadfoot, & Nuttall, 1992; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Lingard, 1990; Polesel et al., 2013; Stobart & Eggen, 2012; Torrance, 2015). The next section unpacks the key contemporary debates about traditional approaches to assessment highlighting the tensions that currently exist for schools and teachers.

1.13 Assessment: Key Contemporary Debates

High stakes tests can be defined as "those which have consequences for student success (e.g. grade promotion or graduation), teacher accountability, the reputation of schools or the funding of schools" (Johnson as cited in Polesel et al., 2013, p. 641). Stobart and Eggen (2012) argue that "tests become 'high stakes' when the results lead to serious consequences for at least one key stakeholder" (Stobart & Eggen, 2012, p. 1). Of key note in these definitions is the lack of connection between high stakes testing and the process of learning. One key tension is that such testing is perceived to serve purposes that are largely disconnected from learning and more about institutional and government accountability, the control and rationalisation of schooling (Lingard, 1990) and as "a key intermediary mechanism between school, tertiary and employment, that is, between education and the economy" (Torrance, 2015, p. 1).

The 'one size fits all' approach of high stakes testing assumes that all students in all schools are the same and are exposed to the same quality of teaching and content, are ready to progress at the same time and can express their understanding in the same way. The psychometric testing legacy that drives current high stakes testing practices, assumes a view of knowledge as fixed and learning common across all learners (Elwood & Murphy, 2015). Whilst espousing equitability, these tests not only make assumptions about what counts as

knowledge, but also privilege limited ways of demonstrating it. The results of this are to disadvantage those who may not possess the "appropriate cultural and linguistic capital to succeed" within this system (Schubert, 2014, p. 185). Historically, the poor performance of some students has been interpreted as a sign of inferiority. Thus, it could be argued, that universal schooling has resulted in perpetuating social privilege and reorganising social structure rather than creating newfound equity for all students. Psychometric and high-stakes testing have played a key role in this (Delandshere, 2001).

Studies have also shown that a student's identity as a learner can be inaccurately constructed through assessment. Reay and William's study (1999) explored how Year 6 students' perspectives of National Curriculum standard assessment tasks (SATs) contributed to their understanding of themselves as learners. Their study identified that high stakes testing classifies academic success in very narrow terms and many students go on to define themselves and construct their identities in accordance with their test performance (Baird et al., 2017).

Key literature asserts that the limited nature of high stakes testing also leads to the narrowing of the curriculum and 'teaching to the test' (Baird et al., 2017; Berliner, 2011; Broadfoot & Black, 2004; Delandshere, 2001; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Polesel et al., 2013; Stobart & Eggen, 2012; Torrance, 2015). In a study which looked at teacher perspectives on the perceived impact on pedagogy and curriculum of Australia's National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Polesel et al. (2013) found that the testing regime "put pressure on teachers to change the emphasis from teaching for learning to teaching for test success" (Polesel et al., 2013, p. 643). This results in a narrowing of the curriculum with less time being spent on those areas, especially creative subjects, which have no direct link to the tests (Berliner, 2011). In this way, examinations exert an oppressive influence on the curriculum, to the detriment of other important areas of learning such as social and political understanding, a student's capacity to contribute to civil society, personal development, higher order thinking skills, creativity and essentially everything that cannot be assessed by pen and paper (Berliner, 2011; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Polesel et al., 2013; Torrance, 2015). Those areas which are not tested are squeezed out of the curriculum and seen as less important and less valuable.

This issue is becoming even more critical as schooling is reconceptualised for the twenty-first century. There is broad acknowledgment that the needs of current students are vastly different

from what they were 200 years ago when the current school system was established (Hattie, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018; Schleicher 2015; Treadwell, 2017; Zhao, 2013). We live in a rapidly changing world and practices born in the old paradigm of schooling need to be revolutionised if we are to ensure that all students are prepared for life beyond school. This requires less emphasis on content knowledge and book-based learning and greater focus on conceptual understandings and a broader range of skills, attributes, dispositions and values (Hannon, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; Treadwell, 2008). This raises the question not only of how these skills and attributes might be learned, but also of how they might be assessed. As schools and teachers grapple with how to transform pedagogies and practices, there exists the enormous tension of how to reconcile current thinking about educational best practice with the requirements of test-based accountability assessments (Suurtamm & Koch, 2014). Increasingly, the usefulness of these assessments is being questioned (Koziol, 2018; Pilcher & Torii, 2018; Stone, 2018).

Among the key attributes to be developed by twenty-first century learners is the capacity to work collaboratively with others (Care, Griffin, & McGaw, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). However, current assessment practices still serve to privilege the individual over the group and fail to take into account the social nature of effective learning. Fleer (2015) argues that when assessment practices reduce education to an individual endeavour with focus on the individual child, the important interplay between children, artefacts, teachers and families are ignored. Standardised testing and norm referencing reinforce individualised competitiveness and achievement and ignore the importance of the social context of learning (Delandshere, 2001; Edlin, 1999; Elwood & Murphy, 2015; Fleer, 2015). In addition, the way in which test results are used by governments also feeds "competition between schools, and shaping public discourses that centre on failure and success, winners and losers" (Polesel et al., 2013, p. 653). At its worst, this competitiveness often leads to cheating (Berliner, 2011; Stobart & Eggen, 2012) and many students experience high levels of stress and despair (Berliner, 2011; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012).

A key criticism of high stakes tests is that they have little to do with learning but rather are driven by political, economic and policy purposes. "While it is argued that assessment sits at the heart of the learning process, in practice, assessment often remains narrowly focused on qualifications and reporting achievements, driven by institutional and societal aspirations and

tensions such as accountability and economic wellbeing" (Timmis, Broadfoot, Sutherland, & Oldfield, 2016, p. 1). This highlights a key tension between high stakes testing for government accountability versus assessment designed to improve learning (Fleer, 2015; Wyatt-Smith & Gunn, 2009). Lingard (1990, p. 182) refers to the "control and rationalisation of schooling" through assessment whilst Broadfoot and Black (2004) bemoan the punitive use of high stakes testing to judge and compare not only individuals, but institutions and educational systems. Furthermore, these assumptions about and uses of assessment that seem far removed from improving learning, are increasingly being questioned in the literature despite their continued use in practice (Broadfoot, 2017; Elwood & Murphy, 2015; Timmis, Broadfoot, Sutherland, & Oldfield, 2016, Torrance, 2015).

In addition, the very structure of high stakes tests is largely driven by cost and logistics (Delandshere, 2001). Without much consideration to learning, the design of assessments is influenced more by technical considerations (Baird et al., 2017). There is a growing testing 'industry' driven by commercial interests and testing often becomes an economic trade-off between cost and effectiveness (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012, Thrupp, 2018). As such, these tests are considered by many to be limited in their usefulness (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Polesel et al., 2013).

1.14 Assessment for Learning

Formative assessment practices are seen by many as the connection between assessment and the improvement of learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009, 2014, 2018; Cauley & McMillan, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Popham, 2008a). For some time, there has been a push for formative assessment practices to take priority over the traditional assessment practices that are essentially summative in nature. The research regarding teaching quality and school improvement has included investigation into the specific pedagogical practice of formative assessment and its capacity to contribute to improved learning outcomes for students. The term *formative* is drawn from the work of Scriven (1967) in which he contrasted formative evaluation with summative evaluation. Scriven advocated the benefits of evaluating the quality of an educational program while it is still developing with a view to improving and refining in process. Other writers such as Bloom (1969) then incorporated Scriven's work into the literature on assessment but this did not have widespread interest among educators as it was seen to have little practical application for the everyday classroom (Popham, 2008b). It has only been in more recent decades that researchers have begun to recognize the possible value of formative assessment and how this might influence teacher practice. Two decades

after Scriven, Martinez and Lipson (1989) stated, "If assessment is to have pedagogical value, then student responses, whether correct or incorrect, must be addressed skilfully" (p. 75). By the 1990s it was beginning to become evident that formative assessment embedded into classroom practice had the potential to improve student learning. However, despite this, it seldom saw its way into teacher practice (Popham, 2008b).

None-the-less, researchers continued to explore the value of formative assessment. Key to this research was the seminal work *Assessment and Classroom Learning* by Black and Wiliam (1998). This research reviewed over 250 studies by researchers from several countries to determine whether there was evidence that improving formative assessment (sometimes referred to in the literature as 'assessment for learning' or AfL[1]) would raise student achievement. This review "showed firm evidence that innovations designed to strengthen the frequent feedback that students receive about their learning yield substantial learning gains" (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 7). Earlier work by Sadler (1998) had also espoused the importance of formative assessment and, in particular, the active involvement of students in the process.

Whilst there has been some debate in the literature around definitions of formative assessment (Bennett, 2011), for the purpose of this research, Black and Wiliam's (2009) definition is adopted. They propose that assessment is formative:

> …to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited. (p. 6)

The central idea of formative assessment is of teachers and students using evidence to adapt teaching and learning to meet needs. It is the ongoing evaluation of student progress to determine mastery of short-term and long-term learning. Formative assessment provides teachers and students with information that enables decisions to be made in order to promote further learning before summative assessment (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008).

The key features of formative assessment are; it is a planned process, it is used by both teachers and students, it takes place during instruction, it provides assessment-based feedback

[1] Although there are some authors such as Swaffield (2011) who argue that the terms are not synonymous

to teachers and students and its function is to provide feedback that will aid teachers and students to make adjustments that will improve student achievement of the learning goals (Popham, 2008b, p. 5).

Building on the work of Sadler (19890, Stiggins & Chappuis (2005) summarise that effective formative assessment should help students answer three key questions: *Where am I going? Where am I now? How can I get there from here?* (p. 15). The formative assessment strategies employed by teachers should engage students in a process of identifying learning targets, being able to work out where they are in relation to the targets and know exactly what they need to do to move forward. Black and Wiliam's early work focussed on five key types of activity that the evidence suggested as having potential capacity to improve learning. These are: sharing success criteria with students, classroom questioning, comment only marking, peer and self-assessment and formative use of summative tests (Black, Harrison, Lee, & Marshall, 2003; Wiliam, 2000, 2007)

In later work, Black and Wiliam sought to draw these five broad headings together and, using theoretical underpinning derived from cultural historical activity theory, move from a "mere list of activities, with the dangers that this carries of superficial adoption, to the linking of these within a coherent framework" (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 9). The outcome of this was a conceptualisation of formative assessment that consisted of five key strategies that the researchers crossed with Ramaprasad's (1983) three key processes in learning and teaching. The activities that were identified in the earlier work could now be understood as means of enacting the five strategies:

1. Clarifying learning intentions and criteria for success
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities and tasks that elicit evidence of learning
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward
4. Activating students as instructional resources for one another
5. Activating students as the owners of their own learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8)

There now exists a comprehensive field of professional literature that outlines various activities and techniques that teachers can learn and use to employ each of the five key strategies (Chappuis, 2009; Duckor, 2014; Glasson, 2009). For many teachers, the adoption of formative assessment practices will require examination of their current beliefs and values

about teaching, learning and assessment and the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and students (Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011).

The potential for formative assessment to significantly improve student outcomes has been acknowledged in the literature (Bennett, 2011; Black, McCormick, James, & Pedder, 2006; Popham, 2008b; Stiggins, 2005). However, the literature also acknowledges that there can be significant disconnect between theory and implementation and an inconsistency in effectiveness (Bennett, 2011; Birenbaum, Kimron, & Shilton, 2011; Boyle & Charles, 2010). Bennett (2011) questions the validity of Black and Wiliam's (1998) meta-analysis claiming that the research covered is too disparate. He claims that the collection of studies included with their different focus areas "is simply too diverse to be sensibly combined and summarised by a single, mean effect-size statistic (or range of mean statistics)" (Bennett, 2011, p. 11). He contends that a more prudent conclusion from the research would be that whilst "the general practices of formative assessment can, under the right conditions facilitate learning…the benefits may vary widely in kind and size [according to the context]" (Bennett, 2011, p. 20).

Boyle and Charles (2010) support this view. They examined the impact of the British government's drive to implement formative assessment strategies across schools via the Primary Strategy policy of 2003. Despite significant funding and the provision of supporting consultants, the researchers found, after six years, very little evidence of formative assessment culture across the forty-three schools. Rather, they report misconception and lack of understanding (Boyle & Charles, 2010, p. 298). However, research such as this seems to indicate that the problem is not with the theory or practices of formative assessment, but rather with a lack of effective contextualised professional learning and support. Birenbaum et al. (2011) conclude from their research that contextual factors play a key role in the success or failure of formative assessment and success is largely dependent on professional learning and group cohesiveness. Their recommendation that "to be beneficial, professional development needs to be situated in the local context, continuously dealing with authentic issues and challenges faced by the school" (Birenbaum et al., 2011, p. 47) supports the professional learning literature as discussed in Chapter 2.

Black & Wiliam (2018) identified that among the benefits of formative assessment are its capacity to inform instructional decisions as well as to develop, between students and teachers, positive relationships that foster learning. This is enabled by the provision of data

for teachers on the effectiveness of their lessons and feedback for students regarding their learning progress. Formative assessment practices ensure that the focus is on the learners and enables the learners to set goals and self-regulate their learning. When teachers work with students to determine their strengths and learning needs, students become engaged in dialogue regarding their own learning goals (Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008). Assessment and learning therefore shift to become a joint responsibility between students and teachers and in doing so have the capacity to support student motivation and achievement (Cauley & McMillan, 2010).

So, whilst empirical evidence of exactly how students understand and use assessment information to inform and improve learning is still lacking, there is general theoretical agreement in the literature that, when implemented well, the practice of formative assessment has the potential to improve the quality of teaching, contribute to the development of relationships, increase student ownership of their learning and, ultimately have a positive impact on student achievement. However, there is less agreement and clarity as to how exactly to embed formative assessment into teacher practice at the local school level.

The literature on formative assessment is relevant to this study because it has been argued that formative assessment practices are more consistent with Christian ethos (Maple, 2014). This study provides an opportunity to explore teacher perspectives on this. Both Newton (2007) and Masters (2014), contend that the core issue comes back to the purpose of assessment and that this must be the starting point for thinking about assessment practices. Masters (2014) argues that if the fundamental purpose can be agreed upon, the need for debate about forms of assessment becomes unnecessary. In other words, the focus needs to be on what one is trying to achieve through the assessment, not the assessment itself. Within the context of this study, this raises the question of whether the espoused purpose and vision of Christian schooling is the key driver in assessment practices or whether practices are driven by the broader political and economic purposes.

1.15 Assessment and Christian Ethos

The literature in relation to assessment and Christian ethos is sparse and confined predominantly to books and articles with only a limited number of research studies. This section provides an overview of the literature that was available, with a view to highlighting the specific issues and tensions which might exist around assessment for Christian schools and their teachers and which could be addressed through professional learning.

Before one can consider the relationship between Christian schooling and assessment, one must first consider the underpinning theology, ideology and purpose of Christian schooling including a biblical view of the learner. At its heart, the goal of Christian education is to help each student to maximise their God-given gifts in order for them to reach their full potential and become 'truly human' (Hill, 1989; Rooney, 2009). A biblical worldview sees each learner as unique and made in the image of God. This uniqueness extends to the ways in which they grow, develop and learn and Christian schools seek to create opportunities for *all* students to do so. Each individual is seen as endowed with natural talents and ability to develop strengths and skills across a range of endeavours so that they find life-long fulfilment in making a unique and positive contribution to society. Christian education, therefore, needs to be holistic, creating opportunities for students to achieve within the "physical, social, emotional, intellectual (including academic) and spiritual dimensions of their life" and to help all students "to search for truth, justice, wisdom and meaning" (Rooney, 2009, pp. 9, 11). The goal for students is captured in the notion of 'biblical human flourishing'. At Oasis Christian College, the site of this study, this concept is encapsulated in a section of their *Flourishing at Oasis Framework*:

The key to human flourishing is Christlikeness
The willingness to live a life of loving, knowing, and growing to be like Christ

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
2 Peter 3:18

We love God
We love and serve others
We are growing in our faith
We find our identity in Christ

Against this backdrop, sits a very different narrative around success and excellence. As outlined in Sections 1.6.1 and 1.6.2, the education system and its assessment practices have been built on purposes that are politically and economically driven rather than based on ensuring the development of godly character and the promotion of a life of biblical flourishing for each individual student. Rooney (2009) highlights the dichotomy when he says "currently the Australian academic standards are internationally competitive and favourable in global

comparisons but do not require the fulfilment of a person's true potential, the completeness of the whole person nor the beneficial application to the community" (Rooney, 2009, p. 12). Justins (2009) argues that education is seen as an economic resource that countries need to mobilise in order to remain competitive in a global market – a value-laden view that runs counter to the biblical values and beliefs of peace, justice, loving one's neighbour and reconciliation.

The prevailing educational practices, particularly those of high stakes and standardised testing, are viewed in tension to the Christian ethos that underpins Christian schooling (Berlach, 2002; Green, 2017; Hill, 1989, 1997; Justins, 2009). Amongst Christian education writers, educational assessment has been described as "rooted in a success paradigm related to an economic point of view" (Justins, 2009, p. 58) and "a bogey that interferes with the learning process and erodes the self-esteem of many students" (Hill, 1989). Green (2017) contends that:

> Measurement in education is rapidly becoming a policy obsession. If only certain people get to determine what education is for, if the wrong things are measured, and if only a narrow range of tools are used to do it, then not only is that grossly irresponsible, it is ultimately unjust. (p. 452)

A number of writers recognise the notion of excellence and the manner in which it is defined and measured as particularly problematic (Freytag, 2008; Hill, 1997; Inrig, 1986; Justins, 2009; Purpel, 1989; Rooney, 2009; Van Brummelen, 2009). Justins (2009) unpacks the definition of excellence pointing out that its Latin origins come from the word 'to rise above' and therefore one cannot excel or rise above unless you do so over someone else. He argues that the notion of excellence implies superiority and success, and therefore failure. Built in to the 'excellence' discourse therefore, is a spirit of competitiveness. Freytag (2008) also questions a notion of excellence which promotes individual competitiveness:

> Academic "excellence" is often characterized in Western cultures by individual success in attaining benchmarks that are frequently established by constituencies with indirect links to education. In the process of climbing and scaling to get ahead, the person striving to realize personal achievement often does so at the expense of others. (p. 129)

The biblical notion of excellence is somewhat different. Van Brummelen (2009) suggests Christian educators look to the Bible for a more accurate understanding. He argues that:

> In a biblical sense, excellence is not just being in the top 10 percent of students academically or winning the highest award. The Bible does not exclude a thorough grasp of knowledge, skills and values. However, it goes far beyond that. (p. 150)

In his survey of Christian school leaders, Justins (2009) noted that they understood excellence as Christlikeness, the faithful use of gifts and wisdom. Freytag (2008) also proposes an alternative, biblical paradigm of excellence:

> …through shared experience and multiple means of expression, individual students and communities of learners can realise excellence in personally relevant ways. This reimagined view of excellence as an ethic is framed by three assumptions: 1) excellence is person centred and not curriculum driven; 2) the quest for excellence is best achieved collaboratively (i.e., in community with others); and 3) multiple inputs, outputs, and means of expression contribute to personally relevant educational experiences. (p. 135)

Edlin (1999) advocates the Parable of the Talents as told by Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 25:14–30 and the story of Mary and Martha in John 11:1-44 as key reference texts for understanding the notion of biblical excellence and how it should be measured. From these Bible passages he contends that a biblical model of excellence is the measure of performance against potential. Each one ought to be evaluated against their own individual gifts and talents and not on the basis of a comparative analysis with others. Using this method of evaluation, he asserts that "the class plodder" would have achieved Jesus' approval for modest achievement a long time before "the smart kid" who put no real effort into using his talents and scoring a high mark" (Edlin, 1999, pp. 173-174). In the literature, this notion of assessment that is individualised and focused on the student's progress and learning, is referred to as *ipsative* (Gipps, 2012; Tierney, 2014).

However, whilst the tensions for Christian schools and their teachers may seem obvious, some argue that Christian schools are almost blind to them and that Christian school teachers and parents accept the status quo without question and identify the purposes of Christian schools to be the same as any other school (Hill, 1989; Hull, 2003; Justins, 2009). Two decades ago, Hill (1997) went as far as to suggest that when it comes to assessment practices, Christian schools have no distinctive:

> Our in-house songs are about fighting the good fight; but in the field we mostly prefer to be as inconspicuous as possible. Consequently, we are indistinguishable, for the

> most part, from those who only love themselves and compete solely for their own advantage. (Hill, 1997, p. 46)

In the same vein, Justins (2009) more recently claimed that, in spite of the spirit of competiveness inherent in the broader 'excellence' discourse, and in spite of the Christian schools' profoundly different worldview, Christian schools continue to market and promote themselves as 'excellent' using the same language as secular institutions. He goes on to question whether it is, in fact, possible for a Christian school community "to embrace the concept of educational excellence (and the competitive and academic environment that accompanies it) while maintaining a strong commitment to their own values" (Justins, 2009, p. 54). In other words, he does not see that the competing discourses can exist harmoniously without compromise and, like Hill (1989, 1997) and Hull (2003), believes that Christian schools need to be far more intentional and proactive in how they manage this significant tension. On the one hand, Christian schools ought to reject the pervasive language of educational excellence in order to stay true to their ethos, but on the other hand, schools do not want to be perceived as somehow less than 'excellent'.

Similarly, Sadler (1996) suggests that the underlying ethic of competition is so pervasive in society that it is regarded by Christians as 'natural' and 'normal' and incorporated into curriculum, assessment and school life without question even though it is incompatible with a Christian ethos. He argues that the Christian school's inability to conceptualise genuine non-competitive alternatives "serves to illustrate how deeply ingrained in our experience and culture the competitive spirit is" (Sadler, 1996, p. 53). However, this competitive spirit does not align with the biblical principle of each person who completes their 'race' receiving a reward (2 Timothy 4:7-8) or of the notion of the 'body of Christ' being a community where each member, with their differing gifts and talents are equally valued and essential (1 Corinthians 12:14-26, Ephesians 2:20-22).

The literature in relation to Christian schooling and assessment does give suggestions regarding the types of assessment practices that would be consistent with a Christian ethos. There seems a general agreement that if Christian schooling is to foster the development of each students' God-given gifts, then assessment needs to be student-centred rather than focused on the system (Edlin, 2014; Hill, 1989; Van Brummelen, 2009). In addition, if Christian schools are to hold true to their underpinning belief that all students are unique and have different gifts, then it follows that they cannot all be assessed in the same way (Van

Brummelen, 2009). Green (2017) suggests that "good practices of measurement chart progress towards proper ends" (p. 451) but just what constitutes proper ends depends very much on what your vision of personhood is. She goes on to argue that if the Christian school vision is for biblical flourishing or, as what Rooney (2009) describes as formation towards being 'fully human', then the tools used for measurement should support this.

Christian discipleship is essentially about formation (and indeed transformation) which makes the practice of formative assessment one that should be an integral part of learning in the Christian school context (Hill, 1989; Maple, 2014). Van Brummelen (2009) argues that the biblical principles underlying assessment practices should include encouragement, excellence and the notion of treating learners as being made in the image of God (p. 149). His view that students ought to be given multiple opportunities to attain the learning outcomes is in line with the principles of formative assessment practices. The Bible calls for teachers to "correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). Feedback, evaluation, guidance and correction should all occur in a loving, positive, supportive manner and be borne out of clear and well-articulated learning goals. Christian education serves to "equip students for works of service" (Ephesians 4:12) so it behoves teachers to use multiple, effective strategies to enable students maximum opportunity to achieve. In contrast to summative assessment, which tends to be final and without scope for improvement, the use of formative assessment allows students to make progress over time and provides students with motivation for and understanding of how to improve. In short, effective formative assessment provides opportunity for each student to achieve their God-given potential.

There is also the question of exactly what should be assessed or measured. Van Brummelen (2009) contends that, in the Christian school context, academic achievement in the narrow sense ought to take a backseat to the pursuit of godly character but also concedes that this is more difficult to assess. Berlach (2002) suggests that the different domains (attitudes, skills, habits and values) can all be evaluated but in different ways though he does not offer a practical model of how this might look. However, there have been some studies (Bradfield, 2014; Fisher, 1998; Francis, Penny, & Baker, 2012; Schultz, 2012) which have explored ways of assessing and measuring 'non-academic' goals.

As part of his doctoral studies in Australia and in subsequent work, Fisher (1998, 2004; Fisher, Francis, & Johnson, 2002) developed both a conceptual framework for the notion of

'spiritual health' along with instruments to measure it in students and teachers. Fisher's framework identified spiritual health across four domains: the personal domain (relationship with the self), the communal domain (relationships with others), the environmental domain (relationships with the natural, physical and human world) and the transcendental domain (relationship with God). Francis, Penny and Baker (2012) also operationalised Fisher's model in a study that compared the spiritual health of Year 9 and 10 students attending three types of schools across England and Wales. These studies affirm the utility of Fisher's model and the instruments that have emanated from it in terms of providing a way to measure spiritual health.

Bradfield's (2014) study was motivated by the fact that although Christian schools espouse a goal for the spiritual development of students, there is a notable gap in the assessment of this key goal. Her study involved the construction and validation of the *Growing Disciples Inventory* (GDI), a student self-assessment tool which functions as an individual formative assessment. Designed to sit alongside the Seventh Day Adventist schools' curriculum, the inventory was developed, validated and trialled with almost 600 students across three continents. The study found that "triangulated findings from qualitative and quantitative data analysis support the use of GDI as a self-assessment of Christian spiritual development in Adventist and other evangelical school settings" (Bradfield, 2014, p. 141).

In a similar vein, Schultz (2012) noted that "several Christian school associations and many Christian schools identify developing a biblical worldview in their students as an important component of their organizational mission, yet few report on their level of success" (Schultz, 2012, p. iv). Sire's (2004) definition of worldview was used to guide the study. Sire defines worldview as:

> A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being. (p. 122)

Taking the three dimensions of worldview: propositional, behavioural, and heart orientation, Schultz developed a new instrument, the *3-Dimensional Worldview Survey*, designed to measure worldview along all three dimensions in Christian students. Whilst this study was a pilot and involved a relatively small sample, it served to highlight the failure of Christian schools to measure or assess those areas which they espouse as being of most value and the

need for the further development of models and resources which can support teachers to do so.

1.16 Summary

The contemporary literature regarding assessment indicates that this is a site of debate and contention within the education field and, especially so, in the Christian education sector thus making it a powerful focal point for this study. This study is an investigation into professional learning practices. However, professional learning must have a focus and a context. The core purpose of this research is to understand how professional learning can support teachers in the context of one Christian school to navigate the relationship between the espoused Christian ethos of the school and their assessment practices. This section has highlighted, from the literature, that this relationship may be one of tension. Teachers in all schools are currently grappling with complex assessment challenges and face a number of dilemmas. These are summarised in the research of Suurtamm and Koch (2014, p. 269) who identify four key dilemmas. Firstly, there are conceptual dilemmas that see teachers grappling with considerations around the 'why' of assessment. Secondly, there are pedagogical dilemmas around the 'how to' of assessment. Thirdly, cultural dilemmas associate with changing school culture in relation to assessment and negotiating these with colleagues, students and parents and, finally, political dilemmas which involve dealing with the lack of alignment between broader system policies and procedures (such as high stakes testing and report writing regimes) which may not align with teachers' assessment thinking and practices. This study is concerned with how Christian school teachers might be supported as they navigate these tensions within their context.

1.17 The Significance of the Research

First and foremost, this study has significance to Oasis Christian College. It provides both the opportunity to hear the voices of teachers as well as a robust and formal way to gather and analyse data on an issue of major importance: how to effectively ensure the outworking of the school's core mission. The study is significant in that it has the potential, through its findings, to generate the implementation of new discussions and practices that could lead to improved mission-practice alignment. This is consistent with recommendations from Prior's (2017) study. His study, which explored the perspectives and practices of school leaders within the Christian Education National association of schools, uncovered incongruity about some of the beliefs and practices within CEN schools. He subsequently recommended "more be done to ensure that school leaders within this school movement undertake professional development

that adequately equips them to develop practice consistent with the beliefs and values of their school communities" (Prior, 2017, p. 4). My study builds on the work of Prior by further highlighting tensions as well as by offering insights into the kind of professional learning which might best address them.

The study is also significant for the broader sector of Christian and faith-based schools. A key challenge is in how these schools respond to external pressures of policy and market forces in a manner that maintains integrity with the distinct ethos of faith based schooling. This study contributes to filling the existing gap in the research about Christian schooling as it contributes to making explicit the tensions that exist between Christian ethos and assessment practices as well as by proposing ways in which professional learning practice might best address these.

This study makes a contribution to the previously un-researched topic of the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices within the Australian Christian school context. Furthermore, the study offers suggestions regarding how this relationship might be strengthened through professional learning. Merriam (2009, p. 51) argues that "what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations" which means that this study can play a role in providing insights which can be advanced in future studies. In addition, this study builds on some of the insights gained and recommendations made in previous Christian school studies such as those of Justins (2002; 2009), Thompson (2003), King (2005), Schultz (2012), Dickens (2013) and Prior (2017) as well as the critiques on Christian school assessment offered by Hill (1989, 1997) and Sadler (1996).

Researchers such as Grace (2003, 2004; 2009) and Green (2012a) have argued that, given the growth of faith-based schooling internationally, there is a clear need for scholarly research and inquiry which will 'illuminate the identity, culture and ethos of faith schools' (Green, 2009, p. 3) and which analyses their educational and social outcomes (Grace, 2003, p. 159). This study is significant in that it adds to this body of research.

1.18 Thesis Structure

In this first chapter, my personal context was explained and the research problem was introduced as were the research questions that underpin this research. An overview of Christian schooling in Australia and a summary of the research conducted within Christian

schools were presented. Together with an overview of the relevant literature around assessment, a context and justification for this research was provided.

Chapter two reviews the literature related to professional learning. This overview of the literature establishes the contextual background through which I was able to interpret and understand the research findings.

In chapter three, the conceptual framework of Pierre Bourdieu which was used to guide this study is explained.

In chapter 4 the research design and methodology are described and justified. The epistemological perspective and qualitative case study methodology are described and defended as is my position as an 'insider' in conducting this study. The methods used to collect the data are outlined, along with the approach taken to data analysis.

Chapter five presents the findings and discussion in relation to the first research question: *How do teachers in one Christian school describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?*

Chapter six presents the findings and discussion in relation to the second research question: *How do teachers in one Christian school perceive the value of various forms of professional learning in supporting them to navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices?* In Chapters 5 and 6 links are made back to the literature and the background theory provided by Bourdieu.

Finally, chapter 7 provides a synthesis of the major claims in response to the research questions, introduces a model to conceptualise the problematic and inform future professional learning initiatives, conveys a number of implications which arise from this model, makes suggestions for further research and offers my own reflections on the research journey; thus providing a conclusion to the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Having described in Chapter 1 the thesis context, this chapter now turns to the focus of this thesis: professional learning that can support teachers at Oasis Christian College as they work to authentically apply Christian ethos in their assessment practice.

This chapter provides an examination of the literature on professional development highlighting the changes in thinking that have occurred over time. In this chapter, literature is drawn from a small number of key recognised theorists and researchers in the field, from very early studies to publications dating from the 2000s. Much of the literature cited in this chapter is over 10 years old. The reason for this is that the chapter focuses predominantly on the characteristics of effective professional learning and, whilst yet to be fully embedded in practice in many schools, these were established some time ago. The goal, through the examination of selected papers that span a longer period of time, is to reflect and capture the key elements of the very extensive body of literature on this topic in order to explore the limitations of traditional models of teacher professional development and to identify the characteristics of what is now a not so 'new paradigm' of professional learning. Given that many of these long established, evidenced based characteristics and approaches to professional learning have yet to be fully implemented and embraced by schools (including, in my experience, many Christian schools), I felt it appropriate for this thesis to revisit them in order to ensure that this study was clearly guided by them.

The first section of this chapter highlights the key drivers for increased attention on professional learning practices at this juncture in history, namely: the importance of the role of the teacher, changes in the educational landscape and the role of government mandated standards for teachers. The second section gives an historical overview of conceptualisations of professional learning. The third section provides a summary of the literature in relation to the key characteristics of effective professional learning, limited to those which constitute the focus of this study. The issue of teacher professional learning is important, however it cannot be considered in the abstract. Professional learning needs to be considered in relation to a particular issue and a specific context. The third and final section of this review, therefore, looks at professional learning specifically in relation to assessment practice.

2.1 Why Professional Learning Matters

An understanding of the significant importance of professional learning will provide this study with a foundation for then exploring further the specific nature of what might constitute best practice in the Christian school context.

First and foremost, professional learning matters because teachers matter. Teachers and their work play a significant role in student achievement (Hattie, 2009) so it makes sense to invest in building the capacity of teachers towards developing the specific types of pedagogical practice that the research supports as having potential positive impact on student learning. Secondly, we are in a time of rapid change in the educational sector (Treadwell, 2017) and professional learning has an important role to play in facilitating the kind of school and system-wide reform needed to accommodate this. Thirdly, professional learning has the potential to support Christian school teachers and leaders in a process of addressing potential dichotomies between their espoused Christian ethos and assessment practices. Effective professional learning practices have the potential to enable Christian schools to explore alternative practices, which might strengthen mission-practice alignment. Finally, professional learning matters because it is on the agenda of the Australian government. The introduction of *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) and the imperative that all teachers participate in professional learning that references them, places professional learning in the spotlight.

In a comprehensive mapping of teacher professional learning activities across Australia in both government and non-government school sectors (*The National Mapping Program*), Doecke, Parr and North (2008) concluded that a fundamental understanding of professional learning in the 21st century is that "professional learning is an important form of capacity building, and is a lever for reform at both school and system-wide levels" (Doecke et al., 2008, p. 257). This first section of the review will present a brief contextual overview of why professional learning is particularly important at this juncture in time.

2.1.1 Teachers make a difference

Teachers and what they do influence student achievement (Cuttance, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Hattie, 2009; Lingard et al., 2001; Lovat, 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005; Rowe, 2003, 2004; Wiliam, 2010a). This study is concerned with the provision of continued support for teachers in Christian schools through professional learning in order to enable these teachers to have maximum positive

influence on the holistic development of students in a manner that is consistent with the school's espoused ethos.

A number of studies provide evidence that confirms the effect of schooling and teachers on student achievement (Hattie, 1992; Hill, Rowe, Holmes-Smith, & Russell, 1996; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). One of the most notable and comprehensive of these studies is the meta-analysis undertaken by John Hattie (2009). Through his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses of more than 50,000 studies, Hattie established six major sources of variance in student's educational achievement: the student, home, schools, principals, peers and teachers.

Hattie identifies 14 important influences, stemming from the teacher, each with effect sizes greater than 0.4, the average effect size of all influences. These include feedback, instructional quality, direct instruction, remediation/feedback, challenge of goals, peer tutoring, mastery learning, homework, teacher style and questioning. The first two influences – feedback and instructional quality – like students' prior cognitive ability – have effect sizes of more than 1; in fact feedback has an effect size of 1.13 according to Hattie's research. An effect size of 1 is equivalent to about a year of schooling at primary level which significantly highlights the important link between the teacher and student achievement.

Hattie's work, however, is not without critics (Bergeron & Rivard, 2017; Slavin, 2018; Snook, O'Neill, Clark, O'Neill, & Openshaw, 2009; Terhart, 2011). Key to these criticisms are questions regarding the methodology of his meta-analysis thus bringing into question the validity of his 'results' and claims. Hattie himself acknowledges the limitations of his study, noting that significant effects such as background and social effects are not included and that his measures of school achievement are limited to those that can be measured quantitatively, thus ignoring many other outcomes of schooling. However, whilst some may have questions around the statistical analysis that underpins Hattie's work, it is important to note that other studies have supported the core elements of his conclusions.

The seminal work of Black and Wiliam (1998, 2009) also aligns with Hattie's findings in terms of confirming the significant influence of teachers on student achievement and identifying the specific practices that have the greatest impact. Their review of over 250 studies revealed that practices that increased the quality and frequency of feedback to students regarding their learning led to significant gains in student outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Similar to Hattie (2009), Black and Wiliam identified feedback, instructional quality and questioning as among the teacher practices likely to improve student achievement (Wiliam, 2010a).

Hattie's findings also align with the OECD report *Teachers Matter* (2005). This report reviewed a significant number of studies, literature reviews and data across 25 countries regarding factors that contribute to student outcomes. Whilst acknowledging that socio-economic background and student ability account for the largest variation in results, this report also concluded, "that of those variables which are potentially open to policy influence, factors involving teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005, p. 26). Subsequent research also points to the fact that, whilst what students bring to the table is of great importance, teacher effectiveness can raise student achievement (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006).

An examination of the extensive research in the area of the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement is outside the scope of this thesis. However, there is agreement in the literature that teachers and what they do, have the capacity for significant impact on student achievement (Isore, 2009; Jensen, 2010; Slater, Davies, & Burgess, 2012). This thesis is based on that premise and the subsequent conclusion that, if teachers matter, then so too does the quality of professional learning designed to support their practice and facilitate improvement. The professional learning of teachers that ensures that they are well equipped to meet the challenges of teaching in the 21st century is of the utmost importance (Husbands, 2012).

2.1.2 Changes to the nature of schooling

According to Mark Treadwell (2008), the school system is entering into a new education paradigm, a second Renaissance. Treadwell contends that the present 400-year-old factory-based education paradigm has run its course and that the new education paradigm calls for a move away from 'traditional practices'. This means moving from content driven, teacher centred, individualised, linear, book based learning towards a focus on conceptual understanding, collaborative networking, interdisciplinary innovation, creativity, critical and higher order thinking and on embracing the dynamic, media rich access to information via the internet (Care et al., 2012; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; SRI International, 2012a; Treadwell, 2008). The goal is for *all* students to attain high standards of education, and also to

be equipped as lifelong learners (Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006). Young people will also need the skills to navigate the complexities of relationships, moral questions and the myriad of bourgeoning ethical decisions that will face their generation (Treadwell, 2008). This latter point has always been important to Christian schools as they seek to develop a faith habitus in their students with the goal being for each student to develop Christlike attributes. How professional learning can support teachers to do this well is a key focus of this study.

In short, the factory-school is not equipped to handle the challenges of the 21st century (Turner, 2005). As society continues to change, teachers will need substantially more knowledge and different skills and they will need ongoing support from within their schools and across their sectors in order to adapt their practice to meet new needs (Guskey, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003; Hinds, 2007). An important question then is, "What is the nature of professional learning which will best support teachers to facilitate such significant change?"

2.1.3 Professional standards for teachers

In recent years, many countries have responded to the challenge of school improvement by implementing a wide range of reforms with the intention of better preparing all children for the changing educational demands of life and work in the 21st century (Schleicher, 2012). In Australia, a key policy response to the research into the impact of the teacher on student achievement has been the development of clearer standards and benchmarks for teachers that can be used to both describe and assess effective teacher performance and make explicit the qualities of effective teaching (Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald, & Bell, 2005). The Christian schools sector (amongst others) has responded to the Standards by developing a complimentary set of standards that are designed to articulate further the expectations for teachers in Christian schools. This section will provide an overview of these sets of standards along with expectations around their use by teachers and schools highlighting their influence on professional learning.

Work on the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers was carried out under the umbrella of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA) commencing in 2009. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was responsible for validating and finalising the Standards in July 2010. Under both the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality (Council of Australian Governments, 2008) and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) the improvement of teacher quality and teaching practice has

been considered an essential reform to improve both student outcomes and the overall quality of the Australian educational system. In response to the research evidence surrounding the link between teacher practice and student achievement, the Standards aim to "define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality effective teaching in 21st century schools that will improve educational outcomes for students" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 2). The Standards have "variously been conceived as tools for professional learning, tools for teacher appraisal, or as regulatory devices imposed on teachers" (Mayer et al., 2005, p. 159). The standards do have their critics (Bourke, Ryan, & Lidstone, 2012; Connell, 2009). However, discussion of such critique is beyond the scope of this review. For the purposes of this research, the Standards are considered, not in terms of their capacity to measure teacher performance, which is a contentious proposition for some, but rather in terms of their role in informing the professional learning of teachers.

The Australian Professional Standards comprise of seven Standards grouped into the three domains of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. Within each standard, there are focus areas that are separated into Descriptors at four professional career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead. The goal of the Standards is to outline what teachers should know and be able to do at various stages of their careers. The Australian Professional Standards for teachers encompass what the research has identified as effective teaching practice and these domains of Professional Practice and Professional Knowledge align with Hattie's five dimensions of expert teachers (Hattie, 2003).

These standards are also important because across Australia the various teacher registration bodies now require teachers to complete at least 20 hours of *standards referenced* professional development activities each year. In order to renew their registration, teachers must demonstrate that they have participated in activities that update knowledge about pedagogy, content and/or practice in accordance with the AITSL standards. These standards are to apply for all teachers across all sectors across all schools, which raises the question of whether one set of standards can adequately capture the expectations for teachers in specific contexts.

2.1.4 Standards for the Christian school teacher

Whilst accepting the role that standards for teachers can play in school improvement, a number of groups, including the Christian schools sector have recognised the need for such standards to be nuanced for specific contexts (Australian Federation of Modern Language

Teachers Associations, 2005; Christian Schools Australia, 2012; GEOGstandards, 2010). Some commentators have felt that a homogenous definition of teacher quality is at odds with the extreme diversity of schools and the students within them (Connell, 2009).

Complementary to the AITSL standards, some initial work has been done by Christian Schools Australia (in conjunction with Adventist Education Australia) towards the development of *Christian Distinctive National Professional Standards for Teachers* (Christian Schools Australia, 2012). Designed to sit alongside the AITSL standards, they seek to "articulate the distinctive aspects of policy and professional practice associated with Christian education" (Christian Schools Australia, 2012). This document provides further focus areas that fit within the existing AITSL Standards and which convey the expectations of what Christian teachers in Christian schools should know and be able to do, that is, to integrate a Christian ethos across all aspects of policy and practice.

The *Christian Distinctive National Professional Standards for Teachers* (Christian Schools Australia, 2012) attempt to address philosophical gaps between Christian school Christian ethos and the broader education field in relation to the role of the teacher. The Standards aim to set expectations and benchmarks for teachers in Christian schools and to make clear that Christian schools have a clear and 'distinctive' Bible-based philosophical framework that purports to underpin all elements of practice and operation. The document is an attempt to highlight these and to emphasise the importance of the teacher's role in the outworking of Christian school ethos.

However, it is worth noting that, whilst the goal of *Christian Distinctive National Professional Standards for Teachers* is to complement the AITSL *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* by including some additional focus areas to each of the Standards, it does not offer any additions to Standard 5: Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning. The cause of this omission is unknown but it perhaps supports the criticism of Hill (1989) that Christian schools have no distinctive practices when it comes to assessment, thus highlighting the importance of this study.

From a Christian perspective, "quality teaching is more than a set of skills, refined and delivered" (Partridge, 2014). Whilst the Christian schools sector embraces the importance of accountability, high standards and effective teaching, it does so from a biblical underpinning which values peace, justice, love and inclusivity and rejects a consumerist culture that

invariably results in reforms and policies being driven largely by economic agendas. A set of standards for teachers in Christian schools seeks to make explicit the goal of demonstrating and cultivating a vibrant biblical faith that permeates every aspect of philosophy, policy and practice (Christian Education National, 2014a) including professional learning.

Whilst the teacher standards serve the purpose of articulating what teachers should know and be able to do, on their own they will not improve the practice and effectiveness of teachers; it is how they are used which will determine their value (Mayer et al., 2005). Having knowledge of best practice does not necessarily lead to best practice and this is why the role of professional learning is so vital. Professional learning can serve as the vehicle for translating knowledge into practice, and, in the context of the Christian school, aligning Christian ethos with practice.

In summary, professional learning matters because, when effective, it has the capacity to equip and improve education's most important asset - the teacher. Also driving the need for high quality professional learning provision is the fact that education is entering into a new paradigm which is seeing significant change not only in the use of new technologies in the delivery of curriculum but, importantly, in the type of understandings and skills that students and teachers will require for the future. Professional learning matters because it has now become a key component of the ongoing registration of teachers. Like doctors and other professionals, now more than ever, teachers are expected to keep abreast of best practice and research and are required to be able to demonstrate the ways in which they have done so. Effective and focused professional learning which aides in ensuring that new skills, understandings and dispositions become embedded in teacher practice has never been more important.

2.2 Professional Learning: Where have we come from and where do we need to go?

Views about the purpose and nature of professional learning have changed over time. This section of the review summarises the literature regarding these conceptualisations of professional learning in order to move towards a clear understanding of professional learning opportunities that will best serve teachers in the Christian school context.

In 1992, Clark articulated that professional development was invariably viewed as "a process done to teachers, that teachers needed to be forced into developing, that teachers had deficits in knowledge and skill that could be fixed by training and that teachers are pretty much alike"

(Clark, 1992, p. 75). Loucks-Horsley (1997) described the traditional professional experiences as "one shot," "'good bye, God bless you' workshops," and "'talk at me' conferences" (Loucks-Horsley, 1997, p. 47). These descriptions reference the types of conferences and seminars that often involve an expert telling teachers about a skill, technique or theory which someone, generally not the teachers themselves, has decided that the teachers are deficient in. Upon leaving these workshops, teachers are expected to implement the new skills in their classrooms. However, many of these traditional professional development opportunities have been disconnected from the teacher's own school and classroom context and lacking in follow up support.

Stein et al. (1999) provided a useful outline of the characteristics of the 'traditional' approach to professional development. They describe 'traditional' professional development of 20 years ago as activities which had shallow focus, were limited to a narrow range of formats and were mostly bounded by short time frames. The goals of the learning were invariably set by an external expert without attention given to the specific context of the teacher and it was up to the teacher to translate new knowledge to classroom application. Finally, traditional professional development tended to focus on the teacher as an individual rather than on a community of practitioners (Stein et al., 1999, p. 244).

Ball and Cohen (1999) suggested that the flawed attempts at professional development were the consequence of a mindset that saw teachers as needing to be *updated* as opposed to being engaged in meaningful and sustained learning. Darling-Hammond (1998) argued a need for professional development to "shift from old models of 'teacher training' or 'in servicing' to a model in which teachers confront research and theory directly, are regularly engaged in evaluating their practice, and use their colleagues for mutual assistance" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 40). In the context of this study, this would suggest that Christian school teachers are regularly engaged in collaborative evaluation of the application of Christian ethos to their practice.

In their critical summary of the traditional professional development approaches for teachers Stein et al. (1999) described them as, "designed to support a paradigm of teaching and learning in which students' roles consisted of practicing and memorizing straightforward facts and skills, and teachers' roles consisted of demonstrating procedures, assigning tasks, and grading students" (Stein et al., 1999, p. 263). It therefore follows that these approaches will not support the new educational paradigm of the 21st century. "To help young people learn the

more complex and analytical skills they need for the 21st century, teachers must learn to teach in ways that develop higher-order thinking and performance" (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, p. 46). In essence, teachers will benefit from professional learning opportunities which support them in their endeavours to update their pedagogical practices for the new era.

The traditional approaches to professional development coincided with a 'silo' mentality that perpetuated the idea of teaching as a private affair that took place within the four walls of a classroom and in isolation from colleagues. Given the ongoing changes occurring in the education landscape, this approach to practice is not sustainable and certainly runs counter to the more recent views of effective continued learning and development of teachers (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). Over thirty years ago, Little's (1982) seminal work demonstrated the value of teachers planning and working together over time. The research took place across six American, urban schools over a period of 19 weeks. Through semi-structured interviews with 105 teachers and 14 administrators along with observations in classrooms, staff development meetings and informal interactions between staff, Little found that when teachers plan, collaborate and engage in professional discourse together over time, it not only builds their levels of commitment to one another, but also contributes to their ongoing learning.

The literature regarding more effective approaches to professional learning is not new. In their discussion contrasting available professional development with emerging ideas about the type of professional development that would better support the future needs of teachers, Stein et al. (1999) well summarised the kind of transformation that is required in both conceptualisation and practice of teacher professional development. Amongst other things, they advocated that professional development should focus on building capacity to understand subject matter and guide students' conceptual development, use a variety of formats and take place in a variety of locations, be of longer duration, take into account the teacher's context and shift away from an individualistic approach to more collaborative and communal learning (Stein et al., 1999, p. 244).

Complementing the summary and recommendations from Stein et al., Hargreaves (2000) described the professional development landscape as follows:

> In the still emerging age of the collegial professional, there are increasing efforts to build strong professional cultures of collaboration to develop common purpose, to

> cope with uncertainty and complexity, to respond effectively to rapid change and reform, to create a climate which values risk-taking and continuous improvement, to develop stronger senses of teacher efficacy, and to create ongoing professional learning cultures for teachers that replace patterns of staff development which are individualized, episodic and weakly connected to the priorities of the school. (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 166)

There is much literature which echoes the early conclusions of Stein et al., Darling-Hammond, Little, Hargreaves and others. In short, there is a high level of agreement regarding the shortcomings of the traditional professional development offerings. They have been narrow, short-term, episodic and fragmented (Borko et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hinds, 2007; Knapp, 2003; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; OECD, 2005). They are often intellectually superficial (Timperley, 2005). They are pre-packaged, unrelated to teaching practice and disconnected from teachers' specific contexts and curriculums (Borko et al., 2010; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005; Timperley, 2005). They focus on the individual rather than the team (Borko et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009) and they have not taken into account what we know about how teachers learn (Borko, 2004).

Whilst attention has been given to the need for schools to offer more powerful learning opportunities for students, it is just as true that teachers also need powerful learning opportunities which are "grounded in a conception of learning to teach as a lifelong endeavour and designed around a continuum of teacher learning" (Borko et al., 2010, p. 548). Professional development has traditionally focused on increasing teacher knowledge but, on its own, this is inadequate and will not facilitate school improvement. Real effectiveness lies in changing teacher practice (Wiliam, 2011a). Past studies show that too often 'generic' learning from external professional development for teachers cannot be directly applied to the teachers' own context and classroom practice (Timperley, 2005). Whilst one-off seminars and workshops can serve to brief teachers and leaders on key knowledge in their field, there is little evidence that such opportunities, generally focused on the individual teacher will, on their own, lead to the kind of change to thinking and practice that is needed (Timperley, 2011a).

Like their students, teachers benefit from long-term, inquiry or learner-centred structures that support a collaborative approach to developing professional knowledge for the local context

(Cordingley, 2013; Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006; Earley & Bubb, 2004; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Moving from a 'show and tell' model that sees teacher development as something that teachers passively participate in as individuals or have 'done to them' to a new paradigm where teachers' collaborative engagement, contextual application and reflective learning are the focus, is a step in the right direction (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017).

In my own experience as a teacher and leader within the Christian school movement, I can see that there has been progress towards the kind of 'new paradigm' approaches to professional learning as outlined in the literature, but implementation has been inconsistent. The Christian schools movement has, since its inception, sought to provide professional development opportunities that are carefully contextualised in that they have been designed to assist teachers in their specific task of teaching curriculum content and attending to the wellbeing of students from a Christian perspective. To a large extent, the Christian school associations such as Christian Schools Australia and Christian Education National exist to support this (Christian Education National, 2014b; Christian Schools Australia, 2018b). However, despite intentional and careful attention being given to the content of the professional development, the delivery has often fallen back into the 'traditional' mode and consisted predominantly of large scale conferences or one off seminars that are disconnected from the teachers' day to day work. It is not to say that these conferences have not had any value, however, on their own, they are not enough to ensure that teacher learning becomes embedded and leads to improved practice over time. They have not been enough to support teachers as they navigate the challenge of ensuring that their practices are underpinned by Christian ethos whilst operating in a broader education system that is underpinned by many opposing philosophies. These types of events could be enhanced if they moved beyond the very traditional, didactic approach of keynote speaker with PowerPoint presentation towards a more consistently interactive and participatory approach. There is significant opportunity for the Associations to consider how they can also support in-school professional learning.

There have been exceptions and, within individual Christian schools, professional learning opportunities would range the gamut of possibilities. However, as a leader working across and within Christian schools, I note that the move towards more collaborative, in-practice and sustained professional learning practice has been spasmodic and often incidental rather than strategically intentional. In addition, whilst the Christian schools movement has given significant attention to bringing a Christian perspective to bear on curriculum content and

pastoral care of students, less attention has been given to the link between Christian worldview and pedagogical practices or, more specifically, assessment practices. The purpose of this research is to address this gap and to explore the types of professional learning experiences that will not only lead to improved practice but also contribute to moving forward the broader conceptualisation of teacher learning within one school.

2.2.1 Changing perspectives over time: From professional development to professional learning

An important step towards moving practice forward is the reconceptualization of professional *development* as professional *learning*. The nomenclature used to describe the learning of teachers varies and many terms are used interchangeably despite the implication of slight differences in thinking. However, both internationally and in Australia in recent times there has been a subtle move towards the term "professional learning" (Bleicher, 2014).

The large scale review of teacher learning in Australia, the *National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project* (Doecke et al., 2008) notes that:

> The differences between present-day understandings of professional learning … are partly captured by changes in language. Although one state (Queensland) has actually reverted to the term, 'professional development', in order to name the professional learning activities in which teachers engage, the preference in other states appears to be to use the term 'professional learning'. The latter connotes individual autonomy and motivation, an image of professionals consciously monitoring their professional practice, learning from their work, and arriving at new understandings or knowledge on that basis. Such learning is typically situated learning, reflecting the professional experiences and insights that become available to teachers within their local school communities. The former term, 'professional development', is usually taken to mean activities done at the behest of employers or systems, involving knowledge that is delivered by outside experts. (p. 9)

In their review of the literature and research on the features of high-quality, effective professional learning and development for teachers and school leaders, Mayer and Lloyd (2011) contend a definition that encompasses both development and learning i.e. the development of skills, knowledge and practice which fosters reflective, contextual application *and* that leads to change in practice. Timperley (2011b) concurs with this definition:

> …professional learning and development … is inclusive of both formal and informal opportunities for teachers and leaders to deepen professional knowledge and refine professional skills as described in the relevant Standards.
>
> These opportunities:
>
> - May challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and understandings
> - Are usually designed to result in changed professional practice for the benefit of students. (p. 4)

The *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a, p. 2) further adds to this, "at its most effective, professional learning develops individual and collective capacity to address current and future challenges". This concept of developing the capacity of both the individual and the collective simultaneously resonates strongly with the Christian school view of collegiality and collaboration. The goal is not for a team of great teachers but for a great teaching team with each teacher functioning at their capacity and in synergy with others.

In summary, later conceptualisations of teacher professional learning suggest that it should: encompass a range of opportunities, put a mirror to existing beliefs, attitudes and understandings, change teaching practice in a way that leads to improved outcomes for students, address both individual *and* collective competence and be focused on both present and future teaching and learning needs. In order for teachers to effectively meet the challenges of 21st century education (including catering for the diverse needs of all learners in an equitable fashion), this new conceptualisation and paradigm of professional learning is vital and teacher engagement in it is not an option (Timperley, 2011b). The next section of this review will explore the characteristics of professional learning which will facilitate the development of teacher practice in a manner that aligns with Christian school culture and ethos.

2.3 Effective Professional Learning in the 21st Century

If approaches to learning and teaching are to improve in order to meet the needs of all students, then it is vital to focus on the professional learning strategies that can move all teachers forward. The new paradigm of education requires a community of teachers that are willing and able to continually upskill and learn and, indeed, model life-long learning to their students. Creating both the environment and the structures to foster this is vital. This next section of the review will explore the characteristics of professional learning which will

facilitate the creation of these environments and structures at this pivotal point in education's history.

In response to the research of Hattie, Timperley, the OECD and others, the Australian Government's *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a) is designed to describe the characteristics of high quality professional learning. It also outlines what is required in order to embed in schools a culture of ongoing reflection and goal setting that will lead to sustained improvements in teaching practice.

The principles underpinning the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers* are drawn from research that considers the role of the teacher and teaching in the 21st century context. In a background paper to the Charter, Timperley (2011b) notes, "Traditional notions of professionalism based on industrial models have been replaced by more flexible notions of successful teachers and leaders being adaptive experts and who work in schools which have a highly adaptive capacity" (Timperley, 2011a, p. 1). Drawing from much of the literature already cited in this review, the Charter advocates the importance of the development of a professional learning culture that will support and nurture ongoing learning. It also elaborates three characteristics of effective professional learning: relevance, collaboration and future focus (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012b).

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) propose the concept of *collaborative professionalism* to describe effective professional learning. Their research concludes that deep levels of collaboration are required in order to transform teaching and learning. Their definition of collaborative professionalism incorporates both high levels of trust in teachers that they can make decisions to improve their practice as well as "structures, protocols and the guidance of leadership" and "precision in work organisation" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, pp. 4-5) that will support this. Their model seeks to avoid *contrived collegiality* (which they describe as top down, enforced teamwork which leads to superficial compliance and dissatisfied teachers), in favour of *collaborative professionalism* "where teachers have strong relationships, trust each other and feel free to take risks and make mistakes". Furthermore, collaborative professionalism is supported by "tools, structures and protocols of meeting, coaching, feedback, planning and review" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 5).

In order to move towards collaborative professionalism, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, pp. 13-14) describe the need to shift away from the more 'traditional' models of professional development and towards practices which embrace wider purposes of learning, teacher driven approaches, respectful dialogue and collaboration with students.

The field of literature is rich with lists of principles of and approaches to professional learning that will better support the transformation of teaching practice (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a; Borko et al., 2010; Cole, 2012; Cordingley, Bell, Isham, Evans, & Firth, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Doecke et al., 2008; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Stoll, Harris, & Handscomb, 2012; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). The selection of characteristics and strategies of professional learning chosen for discussion in the following sections, whilst by no means exhaustive, are included in the discussion firstly because there is agreement in the literature that these qualities are among those likely to lead to high quality teacher professional learning. Secondly, in this study they have also been identified as characteristics that align closely with the philosophy of Christian education.

2.3.1 Professional learning: Clarity of focus

If professional learning is to be effective, it needs to be clearly focused on specifically identified areas of need or innovation. The literature recognises three key focus areas for professional learning – subject content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and general knowledge about teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Timperley, 2005).

The literature confirms widespread agreement that teachers should have solid mastery of the content in the subject to be taught and that subject matter content should be one key focus of teacher professional development (Borko, 2004; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Schleicher, 2011; Shulman, 1986; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). If teachers are to effectively guide students in understanding the conceptual frameworks of the disciplines they are teaching, it follows that teachers require in-depth knowledge of their subject matter. Closely linked to this is the importance of pedagogical content knowledge: an understanding of how students learn the content of the particular discipline (Fishman et al., 2003; Knapp, 2003; Shulman, 1986). Shulman (1986) refers to pedagogical content knowledge as "knowledge *for teaching*" and knowledge of "the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (p. 9). The AITSL *Australian Professional Standards for*

*Teacher*s (2011) Standard 2 also acknowledges the importance of pedagogical content knowledge by setting benchmarks in 'knowing the content and how to teach it'. For Christian schools this includes "knowledge of the Bible as it relates to content and the teaching of the content" (Christian Schools Australia, 2012, p. 2). The goal for a teacher in the context of a Christian school is to "develop a Christian perspective that shows critical engagement with the philosophical framework(s) that shapes academic disciplines and syllabus material" (Christian Schools Australia, 2012, p. 2).

The third important area of focus for professional learning, and particularly relevant to this study, is general knowledge about learning and pedagogy. As well as being immersed in the subjects they teach, teachers require the skills to be able to communicate effectively and develop the advanced thinking and problem solving skills needed by their 21st century students (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011). Teachers need to be armed with a variety of teaching strategies as well as the ability to evaluate when and how to use these according to the context and student needs (Darling-Hammond, 1998). The capacity to manage the classroom, develop curriculum, design meaningful assessment and evaluate practice are all critical elements of teachers' work and should, therefore, become an important focus of professional learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999). In this study, there is a particular interest in how professional learning can support teachers in a Christian school context to develop assessment practices that are aligned with the school's Christian ethos.

2.3.2 Professional Learning: Embedded in practice

Hamilton (2012) asserts that there are broadly two types of professional learning, namely *extracted* and *embedded* (Hamilton, 2012, p. 42). *Extracted* refers to the input of outside expertise whereas *embedded* refers to professional learning which relies on expert knowledge from within the school. Embedded professional learning enables teachers to learn from one another within the context of their own school. One type of embedded professional learning has been identified as the development of a 'professional learning community' (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004; Harris & Jones, 2010), which often emphasizes reflection and observation (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009), action research and collective inquiry (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Embedding the professional learning within the teacher's own workplace enables the teacher to apply on-site learning directly to his or her own context (Borko, 2004).

Embedding professional learning within the teacher's own work also facilitates focus on their students' learning so that direct connections can be made to classroom instruction (Borko et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 2000). According to Fullan (1998, p. 6), "There is no external answer that will substitute for the complex work of changing one's situation". Teachers need to have collective ownership over their learning as opposed to a top down or externally mandated approach.

Doecke et al. (2008) take this idea of professional learning being embedded in teachers' work a step further by recommending that "professional learning should be fully accounted for when determining teachers' workloads given that professional learning is now recognised as a vital component of any school or system-wide reform" (Doecke et al., 2008, p. 260). In other words, embedding professional learning should also include intentionally and categorically factoring it into the teacher's time allocation. This proposal is also supported by the research and findings outlined in the Grattan Institute Report *Making Time for Great Teaching* (Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann, & Cooper, 2014). From their work developing professional learning plans with six diverse schools across the country, the researchers argue strongly that the way teachers spend their time needs to be totally re-prioritised so that more time is dedicated to and deliberately allocated for embedded professional learning.

Perhaps the greatest challenge with this suggestion are the questions of where this time comes from and how it is funded within a school's budget. Whilst encouraging schools to strategically streamline regular meetings and to deal with administrative issues via email in order to allow teaching and learning to have the highest time priority makes sense, some of the Grattan Institute report's other suggestions are highly problematic, particularly in the Christian school context. The report advocates that teachers spend less (or no) time participating in sports events, chapel services, assemblies, extracurricular activities, pastoral care activities and yard duty. The researchers propose that some of these tasks can instead be undertaken by non-teachers (Jensen et al., 2014). Such recommendations are highly challenging for Christian schools given that relationships, pastoral care and spiritual formation have such a significant place in the schools' ethos (Van Brummelen, 2009). These elements of the report are perhaps reflective of the fact that the Grattan Institute is not an educational institution but rather one which exists to contribute to public policy in Australia. Whilst their report's recommendations may seem like logical solutions on paper, what they fail to take into account is that, whilst teaching and learning (including the professional

learning of teachers) is the core business of schools and needs to be prioritised, education is about much more than academic development.

In the context of Christian schools, the aim of education "is the full and balanced development of persons, equipping them with the wisdom to live well" (Maple, 2014, p. 26). Christian schools endeavour to fulfil a biblical mandate to *nurture* children. In other words, to "bring them up and cultivate their capacities in supportive, encouraging and compassionate ways" (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 7). The purpose of Christian education can be summarised as "preparing students to live godly lives in God's world" (Dowson, 2014, p. 43). The role of the teacher includes directing students to follow a godly path of integrity, righteousness, justice and mercy. Indeed, the Melbourne Declaration declares that for *all* schools, education is also about supporting each students' social, emotional, spiritual and physical development (MCEETYA, 2008). Whilst more effective teaching is desirable, so too is more effective nurturing, pastoral care and relationship building. Professional learning in the Christian school context cannot occur at the expense of those activities that Jensen et al. (2014) suggest should be sacrificed to make time for it. Effective teaching for school improvement in the Christian school includes teachers being actively involved in pastoral care, chapel services and extra-curricular activities as these are crucial in the development of each student in the 'non-academic' domains.

In summary, the reviewed literature has shown that professional learning that is ongoing, sustained and embedded into teaching practice is highly desirable, however, accomplishing this can be challenging. The content of professional learning needs to be *relevant* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a) and enable teachers to address the immediate problems and challenges of learning and teaching within their specific day-to-day context (The Department of Education and Training, 2005), but how can this be achieved given the time pressures already faced by teachers?

2.3.3 Professional learning: Sustained over time

The traditional model of professional development was characterised by short, episodic and fragmented sessions but researchers now agree that professional learning which leads to changed practice needs to be sustained over time (Borko et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Easton, 2008; Fishman et al., 2003). Teachers benefit from the opportunity to apply the learning to their classroom practice over an extended period as this

allows for reflection and refinement as well as ongoing professional discourse (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Learning needs to be continual, intensive, inquiry oriented and in-depth in order to change practice (Pedder, Opfer, McCormick, & Storey, 2010). Change takes time, including time to build trust and shared meanings (Hawley & Valli, 2000).

In their mapping of professional learning policies and practices of teachers in Australia, Doecke et al. (2008) concluded that professional learning in the 21st century:

> … is no longer perceived to be an add-on, but is viewed as an integral part of teachers' professional lives which best occurs over a sustained period of time, instead of one-off professional development sessions which are generally perceived to be of little value. (p. 259)

Similarly, in a State of the Nation research project on continuing professional development in schools in England (Pedder, Storey, & Opfer, 2008), teachers reported that professional development which was sustained and intensive had a greater effect on changing their practice. This is particularly true if the learning is to have impact on groups of teachers as opposed to just individuals (Stoll et al., 2012). Engaging teachers in collaborative learning over time contributes to the building of respect and trust and constructive professional dialogue (Borko et al., 2010).

2.3.4 Professional learning: Collaborative

Studies show that professional learning which is approached collectively as a community of practice rather than individually is likely to have more lasting benefit (Borko et al., 2010; Doecke et al., 2008). According to Fullan (2011) learning that is consistent, connected, collaborative and ongoing is more likely to change teacher practice. Much of the literature around new models for professional learning concurs that learning best takes place collaboratively and within the context of community (Borko et al., 2010; Butler et al., 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Little, 2002; MacBeath, 2012). However, now as in the past, my own experience tells me that often "there is simply not enough opportunity and not enough encouragement for teachers to work together, learn from each other, and improve their expertise as a community" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 5) and that most teachers spend too little time on active collaboration (Jensen et al., 2014, p. 7; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

One criticism of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) is that they "elaborately define the 'accomplished teacher' as an individual but say nothing about the 'accomplished department' or the 'accomplished school'" (Connell, 2009, p. 222). Connell (2009) argues that effective teaching can only be understood in the context of the "collective labour of teachers" (p. 222) and that improving teaching should be seen as a collaborative venture of a community of teachers rather than a process of re-skilling individuals. This argument aligns with the philosophy of Christian education which very much sees teaching and learning as a communal activity. In highlighting the importance of learning and working in community, Edlin (2014) writes:

> This reflects another biblical norm: that gifts, insights and competencies that we have or develop are given to us not for personal aggrandisement, but for the building up and encouragement of the portion of the body of Christ (that is, fellow teachers and students) with whom we share daily contact in the Christian school (Ephesians 4:12). (p. 263)

Hattie (2009) suggests that the greatest roadblock in the transformation of teacher practice is the "conception of teaching and learning shared by teachers" and their preference to be "left alone to teach their way" (p. 254). He cites that the lack of sharing of evidence about teaching among colleagues perpetuates teachers holding onto and believing in "the way they have always done it" (p. 254) even though these pedagogical practices may be ineffective. One way to move beyond this is to focus on "learning in and from practice" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 10) and to move teachers beyond their own experiences to engage in collaborative, thoughtful, investigation of student learning and teaching practice in order to inform instructional improvement. "But it takes…the creation of a safe, trusting environment to engage in such criticism, a commitment to share evidence about the effects of teaching, and an openness to new experiences" (Hattie, 2009, p. 252).

With their emphasis on relationships that reflect gospel values, Christian schools should be such safe, trusting environments. With the underpinning of a strong commitment to the collective, Christian school teachers should be open, rather than resistant to such approaches. However, there are challenges. The task of teaching is complex and busy and, as Little (2007) found in her analysis of teachers' accounts of classroom experience, suitable leadership, support structures, resources and time are needed to foster this kind of learning. Also, according to Opfer and Pedder (2011), collaboration has a potential downside which is that

too much collaboration can actually cause conformity. Therefore, a balanced approach is needed. Too much collaboration can be stifling and too little inhibits growth (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) is a key term in the literature (Harris & Jones, 2010; Hord, 1997; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Acknowledging the strong benefits of collaborative learning, schools are being encouraged to formalise their approach to teacher learning by identifying themselves as PLCs. A professional learning community (or teacher learning community) can be defined as a group of teachers or administrators who meet regularly over an extended period of time to focus on key learning and teaching topics (Popham, 2009). Some research has found that in schools where the elements of professional community are high, this is associated with higher student engagement and achievement (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Louis & Marks, 1998). The key characteristics of PLCs have been identified as "shared norms and values, a collective focus on student learning, collaboration, de-privatised practice and reflective dialogue" (Ingvarson, 2003, p. 10). The concept of 'collective responsibility' is also strong in the PLC literature and achieving this requires mutually supportive relationships and high levels of trust, the kind of which need to be built over time (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2010; Stoll et al., 2006).

The evidence supports the argument that professional learning undertaken by teams of teachers in the same school working together over time may not only contribute to a shared professional culture but also help ensure that changes in practice are embedded (Garet et al., 2001). The types of collaborative strategies outlined in the literature include: study groups, coaching and mentoring, partnerships with external researchers and professionals, professional networks, professional discourse and conversation, shared action research, inquiry and problem solving, the establishment of and participation in professional learning communities, collective problem solving, peer observation and collaborative lesson planning. These activities are not mutually exclusive and many naturally overlap, particularly when used as part of a well-structured and focused professional learning initiative. As Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) suggest, for collaboration to occur at a deep level, teachers need to be trusted to drive their learning agenda but at the same time provided with the right tools, structures and scaffolding to support them.

Whilst all schools benefit from teacher collegiality and the capacity to operate as a team (Little, 2002), in the Christian school context this is underpinned by a shared biblical belief that teachers (and in fact all staff) are "members of the body of Christ" as outlined in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 12. Using the metaphor of the body, this passage outlines a core Christian principle of working together, supporting one another and recognising that each person has a specific role to play and gifts to bring which are for the benefit of the whole. All parts of the body need each other and none are indispensable.

> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (Romans 12:6-8).

This passage, and others like it, give Christian school teachers the incentive and motivation to work productively and collaboratively with their colleagues in order to ensure the best outcomes for their students as well as to facilitate the effective use of each individual's gifts. In both a professional and a spiritual sense, it is the teachers' goal for all members of the team to support one another to ensure that each teacher is functioning at their very best.

> If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from which we can learn more about ourselves and our craft. The growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it. (Palmer, 2010, p. 141)

Historically academic culture has been quite isolationist building barriers between colleagues (as well as between teachers and students) and operating as a privatised profession (Hattie, 2009; Palmer, 2010). However, true community can only be built and practised when teachers lay aside competition, fear and busyness to take time for regular professional dialogue and learning together. Given the underpinning commitment to the growth and nurture of every community member, pedagogical discourse is a spiritual and professional obligation in Christian schools and yet, sadly, in my experience, it is often lacking.

One extra challenge that may be of particular significance in the Christian school context is what Ball and Cohen (1999, p. 27) term the "politeness norm" that often dominates teacher discourse. In cultures where the norms of action are centred on respectful, peaceful collegiality, professional 'arguments' which create disequilibrium can be confronting. Some

Christian teachers may actually need to learn how to engage in constructive professional critique in a manner that does not compromise, but rather fulfils, the Biblical view of community and relationships. . Knowing that "iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17) and that observing one another, critiquing each other, giving feedback and engaging in robust discussion is reflective of real Christian school community, does not mean that this automatically happens. As the literature has borne out, achievement of this requires intentional management, structure, ongoing support and time.

2.4 Professional Learning and Assessment

A number of studies have explored the role of professional learning in changing teachers' perspectives and practices of assessment (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Dekker & Feijs, 2005; DeLuca, Valiquette, Coombs, LaPointe-McEwan, & Luhanga, 2016; Dixon et al., 2011; Hill, 2011; Jonsson, Lundahl, & Holmgren, 2015; Livingston & Hutchinson, 2017; Mottier Lopez & Pasquini, 2017; Webb & Jones, 2009; Wylie & Lyon, 2015). Consistent with the literature already outlined, these studies highlight a number of professional learning strategies and characteristics that support teachers in the development of their assessment practices.

2.4.1 Professional learning needs to be targeted and differentiated

In a study which looked at teacher professional learning preferences and priorities in relation to classroom assessment standards, DeLuca et al. (2016) found that professional learning not only needed to have clear focus but that it also needed to be targeted or differentiated according to the career stage and prior knowledge of the individual teachers. This notion of a differentiated approach is supported by Livingston and Hutchinson (2017) who argue that professional learning opportunities for teachers need to be tailored and contextualised for both individual teachers but also for individual school contexts. A study of primary school teachers engaged in a professional learning program to implement formative assessment also led Webb and Jones (2009) to conclude that "no one blueprint or trajectory for change could be identified which could be appropriate for all" (Webb & Jones, 2009, p. 182). Similarly, Hill (2011) found that successful implementation of sustained change in assessment practices across large and multifaceted secondary schools was "dependent upon tailoring the professional learning to the individual school context" (p. 359).

2.4.2 Professional learning needs to be embedded

In looking at which professional learning characteristics teachers experienced as most important for them in order to implement formative assessment in the classroom, Andersson

and Palm (2018) noted the significance of professional learning being clearly connected to the teachers' classroom activities and embedded in practice. When respondents were asked to identify their professional learning preferences in the study conducted by DeLuca et al. (2016), "the two items with the highest means were, 'Classroom-embedded collaborative learning/inquiry working with an expert' and 'Classroom-embedded collaborative learning/inquiry working with colleagues'" (DeLuca et al., 2016, p. 12).

Teachers benefit when they are provided with appropriate tools and scaffolding and are then able to test and trial assessment strategies in their classrooms (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Griffin, Murray, Care, Thomas, & Perri, 2010; Scott, Webber, Lupart, Aitken, & Scott, 2014; Webb & Jones, 2009). Teachers (Andersson & Palm, 2018) saw professional learning programs that support teachers in connecting theory, such as theory in relation to formative assessment, to concrete activities as valuable.

2.4.3 Professional learning requires time

In line with the literature previously referred to in this chapter, the studies that looked at professional learning specifically in relation to assessment practices also highlighted the need for appropriate time to be invested.

Firstly, it was noted that teachers need "time for learning and practising new knowledge and skills" (Andersson & Palm, 2018, p. 16). Furthermore, it takes time for teachers to develop as members of a professional learning team (Griffin et al., 2010). Wylie and Lyon (2015) warn that "school leaders, policy-makers, programme developers and researchers should not underestimate the amount of time and support that is required to support change" in assessment practices (Wylie & Lyon, 2015, p. 158). Hill (2011) supports this and adds that professional learning about formative assessment also needs to take into account 'timeliness' with careful consideration given to the particular times of the year when training sessions take place (e.g. not term 4).

The studies referred to in this section also found that professional learning, focused on assessment, needs to be sustained over time in order to be effective. Some teachers noted that, "Because training was over a long time, it made it possible to introduce strategies and techniques gradually…and made it possible to follow each other's experiences on the way to a formative classroom practice on a deeper level" (Andersson & Palm, 2018, p. 16). More

broadly, professional learning also needs to be sustained and ongoing for the duration of a teacher's career (DeLuca et al., 2016).

2.4.4 Effective professional learning occurs in collaboration

All of the studies on professional learning and assessment highlighted the importance of teachers collaborating, both formally and informally. Dekker and Fejis (2005) found that frequent personal contact with colleagues was cited by teachers as the most outstanding source of support, a finding supported by DeLuca et al. (2016). The collaborative practices of peer observation, mentoring and coaching were also considered valuable by teachers (Wylie & Lyon, 2015). Griffin et al. (2010) noted that teacher involvement in professional learning teams "provided an effective structure to develop a change culture in which cooperation and collaboration were inherent in the daily practices of staff" (p. 394). Furthermore, teacher learning teams have the capacity to affect "teachers' views of teaching and learning and their use of assessment for learning practices" and foster the "development of a shared discourse about student learning and instruction" (Jonsson et al., 2015, p. 115). Hill (2011) also noted the value of ensuring that this collaboration occurs at a cross-curricular level in the secondary school setting.

2.4.5 Professional learning and leadership

The role of expert leadership both within and outside of the organisation was also seen as a key factor in the development of teacher assessment practices. "Knowledgeable support" (Andersson & Palm, 2018, p.18) was cited by teachers as important in helping them to implement new assessment practices. This expert support could come from appropriately trained leadership within the school or from expert facilitators. New knowledge and strategies could be disseminated during in-house professional learning sessions or by attendance at external seminars, as long as these were embedded in practice. It is worth noting that some studies found that online courses and webinars were not rated highly with teachers who generally preferred face-to-face sessions (Dekker & Feijs, 2005; DeLuca et al., 2016).

In looking at the impact of school level factors on changing assessment for learning practices in secondary schools, Hill (2011) found the role of the Principal and senior school leaders as critical. Hill observed the importance of the "Principal as 'conductor' of change" (p. 356) explaining that the Principal needs to be "assessment-literate and familiar with assessment for learning practices" and "conduct the orchestra of change" (p. 356). Similarly, she argues that it is vital that a school's senior staff and management team also have explicit knowledge of

assessment for learning and that time be given to leaders to carefully organise a professional learning program across the school.

2.4.6 Professional learning and changing teacher conceptions about assessment

If professional learning around assessment is to be effective in changing teacher practice, it must deal with teachers' conceptions, beliefs and values about assessment as well as the existing culture of their classrooms (Brown, 2004; Dixon et al., 2011; Webb & Jones, 2009). Brown (2004) argues that in order for professional learning to be effective in moving teachers towards a new understanding of assessment, it must take into account their pre-existing conceptions. What makes this challenging in the school context is that teachers' starting points in terms of their beliefs tend to vary, further strengthening the case for a differentiated or individualised approach to professional learning (Webb & Jones, 2009).

In a study which investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and knowledge about assessment and their practices, Dixon et al. (2011) found that "teachers whose beliefs are congruent with the philosophy underpinning an innovation have a greater chance of enacting the innovation in ways intended than those whose beliefs lack compatibility" (Dixon et al., 2011, p. 375). This is perhaps unsurprising. However, observational data in this study also revealed "inconsistencies between teachers' espoused beliefs and intentions and their observed classroom practices" (Dixon et al., 2011, p. 375). The implication of this for professional learning is that it needs to facilitate the kind of self-reflection that will raise teachers' awareness of their often deep-seated and unconscious beliefs along with an understanding of how these influence practice. Dixon and her colleagues argue that a failure to do so could be a barrier to pedagogical change in the area of assessment. The kind of 'serious talk' that teachers need to engage in should

> …focus on 'unpicking' teachers' beliefs about: what it means to be a teacher, including the teacher's role in helping students learn; the students' role in, and responsibility for, learning; the nature of the relationship between teacher and students and how this should manifest itself in classroom feedback interactions; and the role, place and purpose of self and peer assessment in the promotion of learning. (Dixon et al., 2011, p. 377)

2.5 Conclusion

In the 21st century the imperative for reconceptualising and improving the quality of teaching and learning along with providing increased opportunities for all students (regardless of socio-

economic background) to attain successful outcomes has never been higher (Treadwell, 2008; Wiliam, 2011b). This imperative is acknowledged and supported by the Australian Government through the development of clear standards for teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) as well as clear guidelines and expectations for teacher professional learning (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a). The type of professional learning necessitated in order for teachers to meet the changing needs of students using improved pedagogical practices, is going to require more consistent adoption of what this review has referred to as 'new paradigm' approaches.

Much of the literature around professional learning concurs that learning best takes place collaboratively and within the context of community (Borko et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; MacBeath, 2012). Learning that is consistent, connected, and ongoing is more likely to change teacher practice (Fullan, 2011). Professional learning also needs to be clearly focused (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Timperley, 2005). However, despite extensive literature around effective approaches to professional learning, implementation is not consistent. In part, this appears due to the fact that professional learning is often not contextualised to meet the needs and culture of the specific school and is often disconnected from teachers' real work (Borko et al., 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). Another key challenge is that schools often lack the necessary supports and structures to enable teachers the time to engage in meaningful, collaborative discourse and reflection (Jensen et al., 2014).

Given their strong commitment to biblical community and their view of themselves as the 'body of Christ' committed to the wellbeing and success of all members, Christian school teachers are ideally placed to adopt the more collaborative and embedded approaches to professional learning as outlined in this review. However, in my experience this is not always the case. This study is interested in how professional learning can be effectively employed to support teachers as they seek to ensure that their assessment practices are consistent with the school's Christian ethos. The literature suggests that this will require a commitment to discussing and challenging conceptions, beliefs and values about assessment at both the individual and school level.

Whilst Christian schools, largely through their Associations, have placed significant priority on exploring ways in which they might integrate a Christian perspective into curriculum content and student welfare policies and procedures, much less attention has been given to

biblical approaches to pedagogical practice. The purpose of this research is to address this gap and to explore how the characteristics of effective professional learning might support teachers in one Christian school as they seek to ensure alignment between Christian ethos and assessment practices.

Having set the context for this study in chapter 1 and then providing a review of the literature that outlines why professional learning matters and what the characteristics of effective professional learning are in this chapter, chapter 3 and 4 will now set out the theoretical framework and research design adopted for this study.

Chapter 3: Background Theory

This chapter outlines the background theory that provided a framework for the research questions, analysis and findings of this study. A theoretical framework is that which justifies and gives structure and direction to the research design (Crotty, 1998). Frameworks serve as a map for a study and assist in ensuring that the research is coherent in design (Green, 2014).

The theory that informs this research is that of Pierre Bourdieu, namely his concepts of habitus, field and capital. In this study, I used the theory of Pierre Bourdieu to understand how teachers, with their particular habitus, shape and are shaped by, the field in which they operate. Particular attention was given to teachers' perspectives of how a Christian ethos might be applied in their assessment practice and the way professional learning activities might support this. Bourdieu's thinking tools of field, habitus and capital were developed over time by Bourdieu through testing and applying them to several of his cases and are designed to illuminate the social world. These tools informed this research and were used in the thesis to draw out both the perspectives of the participants and institutional assumptions, and also conceptually to understand, analyse and explain the data collected in this study.

For Bourdieu, practice (for example, in this case practices in relation to assessment and professional learning) results from the habitus of the actors and exchange of capital within the context of the social field. Bourdieu's (1977) conceptual tools can, therefore, be used in this study of teachers in one Christian school in order to make sense of 'what people do and why they do it' in relation to the enactment of the community's Christian ethos and possible tensions they experience in reconciling this with assessment demands. The following section provides a summary of the central concepts of Bourdieu's theoretical perspective that were applied to the description and analysis of the data in this study. Section 3.2 discusses Bourdieu's perspectives on religion and how his conceptualisations have been critiqued and the attempts other writers have made to further develop them. The final section provides a summary of Bourdieu's views on education and assessment practices.

3.1 Bourdieu's Thinking Tools

Bourdieu (1984, p. 101) uses the formula of "(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice" to explain the close relationship between these four key concepts and how they interrelate. According to Grenfell (2014), Bourdieu's theory of practice is essentially a "theory of research practice. In other words, his key concepts only make sense when applied to practical research, and the whole *raison d'être* of the approach is that they should be used in new

projects" (p. 219 italics in original). Bourdieu's social theory provides this investigation with a rich conceptual apparatus within which to frame both methodology and analysis.

3.1.1 Field

This study investigates the assumptions and beliefs of teachers in relation to Christian ethos and assessment with a view to understanding how these might effectively be supported and developed through effective professional learning. Key to this is an understanding of the relationship between the structures of the broader education field along with the agency of the individual and how these combine to form practice within this one institution. Bourdieu's concept of 'field' provides a way of describing and analysing the different 'worlds' which the teachers at Oasis Christian College inhabit.

Bourdieu (1990b) uses the notion of field as a way to conceptualise structured social spaces of positions and as a methodological tool for researchers to use in order to understand and make sense of the world (Thomson, 2014). He sees society as a "multidimensional space, each of whose dimensions is a 'field' in which individual and institutional agents struggle over the production, administration and consumption of forms of 'capital' specific to the field in question" (Rey, 2007, p. 56). Grenfell and James (1998, p. 161) interpret Bourdieu's idea of field as a "structured space of forces and struggles into which individuals along with their habitus-specific dispositions enter". Warde (2004) summarises the defining features of a field as being integrated around:

1. Some particular stakes and the value of those stakes
2. A structured set of positions
3. A set of strategic and competitive orientations
4. A set of agents endowed with resources and dispositions. (p. 13)

For Bourdieu these fields of struggle included the field of Parisian intellectual life, the field of literary and artistic taste and, importantly, the field of education (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990).

> The various spheres of life, art, science, religion, the economy, politics, and so on, tend to form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities, and forms of authority. (Wacquant, 1998, p. 221)

Bourdieu theorised that these relatively autonomous, but structurally similar social fields in which "production, exchange and consumption of different types of material and cultural

resources takes place" (Cvetičanin, 2012, p. 36) have identifiable characteristics, or logics of practice which exist in relation to, and contest with, other possible practices (Hardy, 2009, p. 75). They are "spaces of competition, and the form in which this competition is carried out is through practice" (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013, p. 27).

Fields are dynamic because they are changed by both internal practices and by their convergence with other fields (Webb, Danaher, & Schirato, 2002). Each of the fields have their own orthodoxy, ways of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs - both explicit and implicit (Grenfell & James, 1998). These rules of the field are a kind of 'unquestioned truth' or, in Bourdieu's terms, doxa; "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16).

Bourdieu writes about fields as "fields of forces" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In physics, a force field describes the region around an object that exerts a force, or a push, in a particular direction. In the same way, Bourdieu proposed that the social world could be perceived as being made up of opposing forces and that "fields are arenas of struggle in which individuals and organisations compete unconsciously and consciously" (Benson, 2006, p. 190). What they are competing for and the opposing poles that constitute this site of struggle are economic and social capital (Benson, 2006; Thomson, 2014). Furthermore, the social world or field of power is made up of a number of fields and subfields and whilst each of these have their own internal logics and rules, they are not on a level playing field (Thomson, 2014). Some fields have more power than others (such as the economic and political fields) and what happens in one field can be impacted by activity in another. This study is focused within the field of education. However, there does exist a hierarchy of fields or an overlapping and intersecting of subsets of fields within education (Verter, 2003). So, as well as operating in the broader field of education, the institution in this study could also be seen as operating within the subfield of private education and then the further subfield of Christian education. In addition, the Christian education field could be seen to intersect with the field of religion.

For Bourdieu it is the relationship between the objective structures of the field along with the agency of the individual habitus, which combine to form practice. Bourdieu's toolkit of concepts is most useful in this study which is interested in the relationships of power between the relevant fields and subfields (e.g. economics, politics, education) and the ways in which the teachers in the institution under investigation navigate the various tensions and struggle for 'stakes' as they are subjected to the opposing forces of these fields.

Bourdieu wrote quite extensively about the education field (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990; Bourdieu, Passeron, & de Saint Martin, 1994) arguing that it was a field which reproduced itself more than others and that it was the key mechanism through which the values and associations that comprise social spaces are passed on from one generation to the next in a way that tends to reproduce social divisions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). He contended that education was one of a number of strategies used by families to preserve or improve their social position (Bourdieu, 1998).

A key consideration in this research lies around exactly what are being espoused and, in practice, prioritised as the crucial values to pass on from one generation to the next in the context of one Christian school. Furthermore, this research explores the compatibility of the biblical values of the school with the prevailing values that underpin some forms of assessment within the broader education system. The research seeks to identify the opposing forces that exist within the context of one Christian school, the struggles being waged over various forms of capital and the ways that strategies that might support the school as it seeks to foster a faith habitus in both its teachers and students.

3.1.2 Habitus

According to Bourdieu (1990b), the wider complexities and logic of practices within a field cannot be understood without understanding the dispositions (assumptions, behaviours, distinctions and preferences) of individuals – the *habitus*. This concept is central to Bourdieu's theory of practice and, as such, provides a way of understanding social activity (Grenfell & James, 1998). Habitus designates "systems of durable and transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) through which individuals perceive, judge, and act in the world. These dispositions, generally shared by class and cultural groups, "make up a system of shared beliefs, attitudes and inclinations" and guide the social actions of individuals (Ladwig, 1994, p. 347). Habitus is both subjectively created by individuals as they actively internalise a set of dispositions, and is also adapted to identified social goals, practices and representations of relevance to their social worlds. As such, the internal structures through which individuals construct the social world result from the internalisation of the structures of that world (Wacquant, 1989, p. 28).

Bourdieu (1990b) describes the relationship between habitus and field as a "conductorless orchestration" which leads to consistent and systematic practice (p. 59). According to Bourdieu (1990b),

> The *habitus* – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present…The *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness or will…. (p. 56 italics in original)

For Bourdieu (1990b), habitus, which includes embodied capital, encompasses how people act in a way that is reflective of social class structures and their process of socialisation, which is in turn reproduced by their actions. He contends that, whilst individual members of a class construct their individual experiences in the context of that class, they are nonetheless subjected to "similar conditions of existence and conditionings" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 59). In other words, the notion of habitus infers habit or unthinking-ness in actions and that dispositions can be shared by people who have been subjected to similar experiences, with each person having a unique individual variant of the common matrix (Wacquant, 1998).

This study seeks to describe and understand the way that the teachers' habitus influences their individual and collective views of assessment within the Christian school context. The teachers at Oasis Christian College have been 'habituated' by the broader education system, which has shaped their dispositions, views and practices. In addition, the teachers hold a religious worldview, beliefs and values based on the Bible. In this study, these are conceptualised as constituting their faith habitus. Furthermore, the institution of the Christian school seeks to influence or structure the habitus of its teachers and students in line with its Christian ethos. This study explores the way in which divergent influences or 'opposing forces' of the education and religious fields create tensions for teachers, specifically in relation to the practice of assessment. Furthermore, the study seeks to investigate teachers' perspectives of how professional learning might support them in navigating these tensions and assist in 'reshaping' their individual and collective habituses.

"One's habitus inclines one to deem various forms of 'capital' as worthy of pursuit; once obtained, material or symbolic capital, as forms of power or resources, determines one's position' in any given field…" (Rey, 2007, p. 56). For Bourdieu, an understanding of how

habitus and field shape practice can only occur when one understands the specific nature of *capital* that is produced, reproduced, valued and shared within the field.

3.1.3 Capital

For Bourdieu, 'fields' are arenas for struggle over 'capital'. This study explores the struggle over different forms of cultural capital in one Christian school. On the one hand, Oasis Christian College is a site that is generating and reproducing the kind of cultural capital that Bourdieu argues perpetuates the privileging of only certain abilities and certain individuals. At the same time, the school also seeks to privilege, promote and cultivate 'spiritual resources' which should be freely available to all members of the community and which serve to foster within them faith habitus.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that individuals and classes who inhabit social spaces or *fields* are characterised by "their overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital" (p. 114) and that it is this capital which serves to distinguish various social classes. The structured system of positions that exist within a social field and the relationships between them are determined by the distribution of resources, or forms of capital.

Bourdieu's objective is to broaden the use of the term capital beyond its well established use to include non-economic sources of power. According to Harker et al. (1990, p. 13)

> the definition of capital is very wide for Bourdieu and includes material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns…For Bourdieu capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended 'to all goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation'. (Bourdieu as quoted in Harker et al., 1990, p. 13)

Bourdieu uses the term capital as a way of emphasizing societal power relations as individuals struggle to acquire valuable resources (Bourdieu, 2011). The amount of power a person has within a field depends on that person's position within the field and the amount of capital he or she possesses" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 23). Furthermore, through "transubstantiation" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 242) economic capitals can be converted into other forms of capital and,

under certain circumstances cultural and social capital can be converted into other forms of capital.

Economic capital relates to one's wealth and income. Bourdieu views economic capital as important because of its strong influence on an individual's level of other forms of capital (Allan, 2011). Social capital refers to an individual's social network. It is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 248). These groups could include a family, a school, a social class, a club etc.

Bourdieu's notion of *cultural* capital is particularly central to his writings on the field of education. In an exposition of Bourdieu's forms of capital, Allan (2011) writes that "cultural capital refers to the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners…It is the different ways we talk, act, and make distinctions that are the result of our class" (p. 171).

> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc.), … and in the *institutionalised* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 242, italics in original)

Bourdieu saw the field of education as highly significant because of its capacity to confer and distribute cultural capital. The education field values certain forms of knowledge and a type of formal learning which confers much more cultural capital than many other forms of less formal or practical learning (Webb et al., 2002). Furthermore, "in research undertaken by J-C Passeron schools were revealed not to be socially neutral institutions; instead, their programs and evaluation practices were based on the culture of the dominant classes" (Cvetičanin, 2012, p. 31). Because of this, schools and educational institutions distribute cultural capital inequitably, favouring those who are disposed towards the type of 'academic excellence' that these institutions, and the education system more broadly, deem of value.

3.2 Bourdieu and Religion

I argue that in this study Oasis Christian College is an example of an institution which overlaps two fields and within it exists a struggle over competing views about education and, ultimately, capital. This section provides an overview of the theories of Bourdieu and others in relation to the notions of 'religious' and 'spiritual' capital and how these are operationalised within the field of religion. This section draws the conclusion that whilst the struggle for economic, social and cultural capital can be investigated at Oasis Christian College, neither 'religious' nor 'spiritual capital' are suitable ways to conceptualise the resources that Oasis Christian College is seeking to foster and distribute in order to realise its vision. This is because the concept of 'capital' is not appropriate to describe the values, ethics and beliefs which underpin the Christian faith and which the Christian school seeks to cultivate. According to the Bible, rather than having to compete or struggle to receive God's grace, forgiveness and spiritual gifts, these are given freely and abundantly by God. Spiritual resources do not serve to distinguish the social classes but quite the opposite; they serve to bring unity and should function as a social leveller. The concept of capital is therefore not consistent with Christian ethos.

In 1991, Bourdieu introduced a further category of field and capital: 'religious' which he positioned very separately from the other forms of capital. He describes it as:

> … the result of the monopolization of the administration of the goods of salvation of a body of religious *specialists*, socially recognised as the exclusive holders of … knowledge, the religious field goes hand in hand with the objective dispossession of those who are excluded from it and who therefore find themselves constituted as *laity* … dispossessed of *religious capital*…. (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 9 italics in original)

For Bourdieu (1991a), the religious field and religious capital are associated with the dispossession of the laity and the reproduction of social and class inequality. He believed that the key functions of religion are the "*monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and world-view of lay people"* (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 126 italics in original). Bourdieu's view was that religious capital is a type of capital that is protected and distributed by religious professionals (Grusendorf, 2016). According to Rey (2007), Bourdieu placed little significance on the good that religion might contribute to humanity nor did his writings acknowledge the human experience of spirituality or mystical experience. Bourdieu himself was not religious and had no interest in religious activity

(Dianteill, 2005; Swartz & Zolberg, 2005) and he maintained that the influence of religion in the modern world is in decline (Bourdieu, 1991a).

Not all writers agree with Bourdieu's conception of the religious field (Dillon, 2001; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Green, 2012b). Dillon (2001) argues against the notion that the religious field is always vying to monopolise the laity. Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) employed a broader view of religion rather than limiting the term to apply only to a church. Green (2012b) provides an example of how a religious field can overlap with a secular field.

> Catholic education in England overlaps with the field of state-funded education. This creates competition within fields arising from different assumptions about what education is for and manifesting itself in competition for position and cultural recognition. (p. 11)

In his writings about religious capital, Bourdieu most often refers to it in the institutionalised state which aligns with his view of the church as the "archetypal social institution, establishing, legitimating and reproducing social inequality" (Green, 2012a, p. 395). Both Verter (2003) and Guest (2007) argue that the problem with Bourdieu's understanding of religious capital is that it is shaped by a specific form of French Roman Catholicism and is therefore limited in its application. Verter writes of Bourdieu's religious capital:

> …this model treats religion as an institution but not as a disposition, as an intricate system of coercion but not as a liquid species of capital. In short, it employs categories that are too rigid to account for the fluidities of today's spiritual marketplace. (Verter, 2003, p. 151)

Guest (2007, p. 8) agrees that the weakness of Bourdieu's conception of religious capital is "its inability to cope with the complexities of the contemporary religious landscape, including the expansion of religion into a more detraditionalised spirituality". In addition, Verter (2003, p. 156) argues that Bourdieu's "vision of the religious field – perhaps of fields generally – is too insular" and that his religious capital is conceived too narrowly in that it operates only within the field of religion and largely as a resource to perpetuate class inequality. Its other limitation, according to Verter (2003) is that it denies the idea that lay people might amass religious capital (Bourdieu's religious capital is monopolised by the clergy). He writes, "The problem is that Bourdieu perceives religion almost exclusively in organisational terms…this leaves little room for imagining lay people as social actors, capable, for example, of manipulating religious symbols on their own behalf" (Verter, 2003, p. 151). The arguments of

Verter and Guest are particularly pertinent to this study which seeks to identify how teachers perceive the value of different types of capital within an institution which could be argued overlaps two fields: education and religion, and which is far removed from Bourdieu's religious benchmark of the medieval church. The Christian school context of this study requires a more refined view than what Bourdieu's notion of religious capital provides.

In an attempt to address the perceived deficiencies of Bourdieu's notion of religious capital, some writers have developed a conception of *spiritual capital* (Baker & Skinner, 2006; Finke, 2003; Grace, 2002, 2010; Verter, 2003). Verter's (2003) is a multi-faceted model which seeks to draw on and further refine Bourdieu's later work:

> Thus, if religious capital is conceived a la Bourdieu as something that is produced and accumulated within a hierocratic institutional framework, spiritual capital may be regarded as a more widely diffused commodity, governed by more complex patterns of production, distribution, exchange and consumption. (Verter, 2003, p. 158)

Unlike Bourdieu, Verter identifies spiritual capital as a form of cultural capital which exists in all three forms: *embodied*: knowledge, abilities, tastes and credentials that an individual has amassed in the field of religion; *objectified*: material and symbolic commodities such as objects, texts, rituals, theologies; and *institutionalised*: power exerted by churches and religious organisations to legitimate religious goods, promote the demands for these goods and feed the supply by bestowing qualifications on a select group of producers (Verter, 2003, pp. 159-160).

Though perhaps less sophisticated than Verter's, Grace's view of spiritual capital was developed as a result of his analysis of a study of 60 Catholic school leaders in England in an attempt to better theorise faith based education (Grace, 2002). In his early work, Grace (2002, p. 236) defines spiritual capital as "resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition", and in relation to the Catholic schooling system he argues that "the renewal of spiritual capital …becomes the crucial question for the continuance of its *distinctive* mission in the future" (Grace, 2002, p. 238 italics in original). In response to criticisms that his early definition lacked adequate historical and theoretical elaboration, Grace's (2010) later writing extends this definition to say that spiritual capital includes the personal dimension of "faith in practice, action and relationships" (p.120), is a "sustaining resource for everyday leadership in Christian living and working" (p. 120), is a "form of spirituality" (p. 125) and incorporates the notion of an individual's "theological literacy" (p.

120). Like Verter (2003), Grace's goal was to describe a type of spiritual capital which could be applied in fields other than religion (i.e. education) and which could be distributed broadly.

In the William Temple Foundation research project Baker and Skinner (2006) distinguish between spiritual and religious capital proposing the following definitions:

- Spiritual capital energises religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis of faith. Spiritual capital is often embedded locally within faith groups but also expressed in the lives of individuals.
- Religious capital is the practical contribution to local and national life made by faith groups. (p. 4)

Their definitions seek to highlight the practical and tangible ways that faith groups contribute to the benefit of the wider society (religious capital) and the values, ethics, beliefs which underpin these actions (spiritual capital).

Montemaggi (2011) however, suggests a number of shortcomings in these conceptualisations of spiritual capital. She argues that notions such as those proposed by the William Temple Foundation research project are not objective, but rather are used to mask the reality of power. Furthermore, she notes that the materialistic notion of 'capital' is incongruent with the goal of conceptualising "that which is of value in spirituality and faith to human relations and civil society" (Montemaggi, 2011, p. 79). According to Bourdieu (1986), the structure and distribution of capital is subject to the same type of inequities as the social world and that the appropriation of capital requires an agent to be engaged in a relationship of "competition between himself and the other possessors of capital competing for the same goods, in which scarcity – and through it social value – is generated" (p. 49). The kind of spiritual capital that Verter (2003), Grace (2002, 2010) and Baker and Skinner (2006) attempt to conceptualise is based on a biblical worldview and is not a resource that is scarce and must be fought over, but rather is freely available to all in abundance. This is somewhat different from Bourdieu's conceptualisation.

The notion of spiritual capital is, therefore, somewhat contested. On the one hand, it is helpful to have a way of describing spiritual resources – those beliefs, values, worldviews, dispositions, traditions, rituals etc. which can be developed and cultivated and which form a faith habitus. However, describing these as a form of *capital* is somewhat less helpful. The metaphor of 'capital' is connected with wealth, means of production, resources which are

scarce, fought over and exchanged for benefits and the idea of the "means of production [being] monopolised by a particular section of society" (Marx, 2001, p. 1091). It is not a metaphor that is consistent with Christian ethos. In the context of this study, my analysis of the term *spiritual capital* is consistent with the view of Montemaggi (2011). The use of the term capital would seem incongruous with the goal of trying to describe resources that, according to the Christian faith, are freely available to all and intended to be shared broadly and abundantly. Scripture which gives account of the words of Jesus, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10) are a reflection of this.

As the term *spiritual capital* is considered too restrictive and inappropriate, in this study the term *spiritual resources* is instead used to describe the values, morals, theological understanding, rituals and spirituality of the Christian faith. It could be said that the Christian school in this study seeks to foster, develop and distribute spiritual resources in order for the purpose of Christian education to be fulfilled, namely "to develop within each student the desire and ability to fulfil God's will in their lives" (Oasis Christian College Mission Statement). Of particular interest in this study, is whether the fostering of spiritual resources and the development of a faith habitus in students at Oasis Christian College are perceived by teachers as being compromised by the assessment regimes and prevailing paradigm of the broader field of education.

3.3 Bourdieu on Education and Assessment

Given that this study is about teacher professional learning needs in relation to assessment, it is worth considering Bourdieu's analysis of the role of education and how this is served through assessment regimes. Doing so provides a framework through which to understand both the structuring forces on the Oasis Christian College teachers' habituses and the tensions they experience as they seek to foster in students a faith habitus, as well as the sharing of spiritual resources.

Bourdieu dedicated a great deal of time and effort to analysing and investigating the field of education and its institutions, with much of his evaluation based on his own experience in the French context. Bourdieu's research found that schools and universities serve to reproduce cultural capital and perpetuate social inequality. According to Bourdieu:

> Every institutionalized educational system owes the specific characteristics of its structure and functioning to the fact that, by the means proper to the institution, it has to reproduce the institutional conditions whose existence and persistence (self-

> reproduction of the system) are necessary to both the exercise of its essential function of inculcation and to the fulfilment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary with it does not produce (cultural reproduction), the reproduction of which contributes to the reproduction of the relations between the groups or classes (social reproduction). (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 54)

Bourdieu saw education as a key means through which social values and divisions are reproduced. He argued that the education field, more than any other, was a field that reproduced the arbitrary nature of class distinctions by "communicating the values and meanings of the existing social order, values that students are disposed to accept as natural and legitimate" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 119). Bourdieu saw educational institutions as particularly significant in reproducing social inequity because of their capacity to bestow cultural capital on their participants. Bourdieu observed this cultural capital as playing a critical role in the reproduction of social structures. Bourdieu identified that relationships between the various social classes could be mapped according to the relative amount of capital possessed by each class and that the education system was responsible for regulating the distribution of this cultural capital (Webb et al., 2002). For Bourdieu, one of the key mechanisms for distributing capital and perpetuating this system of dominance and subordination was the system of examinations.

Bourdieu contended that, through examinations, schools convey academic values by imposing a definition of knowledge as well as the way that this knowledge should be demonstrated. He regarded examinations as "one of the most efficacious tools for the enterprise of inculcating the dominant culture and the value of that culture" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 142). Whilst the purpose of schools is to teach and socialise students, Bourdieu noted that schools teach students only certain subjects in particular ways and, likewise, socialises them in certain ways (Schubert, 2014). Examinations allow the dominant classes to validate the power and status they already have (Gipps, 1999).

Bourdieu is not alone in claiming that academic hierarchies created through the sorting and sifting of students serve to validate and reproduce social hierarchies. For example, Broadfoot (1979, 1996) argues that assessment in developed societies is a form of social control and serves to legitimate social inequalities. Gipps (1999) also contends that, whilst intelligence testing was initially regarded as objective and equitable, in reality such tests may

"institutionalize and legitimate social stratification" (Gipps, 1999, p. 361). According to Connell (1993),

> In Western school systems, and Western-style school systems elsewhere in the world, a particular assessment regime is hegemonic. This means that it is culturally dominant, connected with the society's central structures of power; and that it functions to maintain the social power and prestige of dominant groups. (p. 75)

For Bourdieu, examinations are a mechanism for disguising the indiscriminate nature of social hierarchies by teaching students the 'natural order'. Bourdieu (1991b) observed that, "between the last person to pass and the first person to fail, the competitive examination creates differences of all or nothing that can last a lifetime" (p.120). Through pedagogic action, and particularly testing practices, the existing social order becomes accepted as second nature to students and embedded in their habitus. He claims that "all pedagogic action is objectively a symbolic violence to the extent to which it is an imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). This notion of symbolic violence refers to "*the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167 italics in original). In other words, symbolic violence refers to the ways that every day and accepted practices serve to reinforce cultural and social domination. Schools impose systems of meaning and belief, which are taken for granted by participants thus disguising their role in perpetuating the reproduction of power relations. This is realised through a process of *misrecognition:* "the process whereby power relations are perceived not just for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. xxii).

3.4 Summary

Despite Bourdieu's indifferent evaluation of religion and his view that "religions 'impose' worldviews on people by 'inculcating' into their habitus modes of perspective and thought" therefore reproducing people's misrecognitions (Rey, 2007, p. 79), a number of religious scholars have none-the-less sought to utilise Bourdieu's concepts in their analysis of religion and its impact on the social world (Rey, 2004). Within the literature there is a firm precedent for the use of Bourdieu's thinking tools to research religion and education (Angus, 1988; Beck, 2007; Grace, 2002; Green, 2009; Verter, 2003) and some researchers have sought to apply Bourdieu's theory in an analytical framework that has different or more distinctive assumptions about religious worldviews and their impact on culture and society than those held by Bourdieu himself (Baker & Skinner, 2006; Finke, 2003; Grace, 2002; Verter, 2003).

Furthermore, although the Australian school culture of the 21st century is perhaps more open and democratic than the French school system which was the focus of Bourdieu's studies, his ideas are none-the-less pertinent in helping us to understand school systems of modern western societies, as long as his models are contextualised to the local case (Webb et al., 2002).

In writing about Bourdieu's concepts as an intellectual resource for those working in education, Harker (1990, p. 99) contends that:

> …there are two tasks in front of educationalists who would seek to use Bourdieu theoretically… First, it is necessary to catch up with Bourdieu theoretically, by seeing his work as a method of enquiry, rather than a completed theoretical edifice; and second, to work out the method in relation to their own social space and the particular 'field' of education within it.

This articulates the goal of this study, namely to take some of the tools provided by Bourdieu and apply these to an investigation into practice within a Christian school. Bourdieu's concepts informed the formulation of the research questions, the questions I asked of my data, the way in which I generated codes for analysis and how I conceptualised my findings.
The following chapter will outline how I did this within the context of a qualitative case study.

Chapter 4: Research Design

This chapter outlines the justification of the research design and methodology adopted for this study and explains how Bourdieu's concepts are used as both a theoretical and analytical tool to frame it. The chapter commences by setting the study within a constructionist epistemology and a qualitative paradigm. It then proceeds to substantiate the use of case study methodology and discuss my position an insider researcher within the context of this study. After providing information about the participants in this study and the manner in which they were selected, the data collection techniques of document and artefact review and individual semi-structured interviews are outlined as is the way in which Bourdieu's theoretical tools of field, habitus and capital were applied to the description and analysis of data. The chapter concludes by considering the trustworthiness and dependability of the research along with ethical obligations.

4.1 Epistemology

This study seeks to understand how individual teachers make sense of their experiences regarding the integration of Christian ethos into their assessment practices and how professional learning might support this within the context of their Christian school. For that reason, a constructionist epistemology was adopted. Epistemology is the study of knowledge of the world and is concerned with providing a philosophical basis for establishing what knowledge is possible and how the researcher can ensure that this philosophical basis is both appropriate and justifiable (Maynard, 1994; Thomas, 2009). The methodology of this study is based on an epistemology or belief that meaning is not discovered, but constructed (Crotty, 1998) and that knowledge is constructed through the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). A constructionist epistemology maintains the view that "all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In other words, meaning is not discovered, but built, and people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon and within the same social context. Knowledge and meaning are not created out of nothing, but formed with humans engaging and making sense of their experiences, each based on their own historical and social perspectives as they engage within a given context (Crotty, 1998).

4.2 Qualitative Paradigm

This study focuses on the *meaning* of social experiences rather than their measurement, placing the research within a qualitative paradigm. It seeks to explain the views of teachers within their contextual setting in order to investigate the meaning they attach to these experiences (Holden & Lynch, 2004). Specifically, this study endeavours to understand how teachers in one Christian school describe the relationship between the espoused Christian ethos and assessment practices as well as the teachers' perspectives regarding how professional learning experiences might support them in navigating this relationship.

Qualitative research is generally concerned not with paradigms of inquiry that emphasise measurement, statistical analysis of causal relationships, perceived measures of objectivity or value-free orientations, but rather with understanding how people make sense of their world. It involves both the researcher and the participants in a process of discovery. The qualitative researcher is concerned with the ways in which participants make sense of their social surrounds and the constructionist paradigm acknowledges the existence of multiple and varied realities constructed by individuals within social settings (Hatch, 2002, p. 9).

Creswell (2013) provides a definition of qualitative research that summarises its key characteristics:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the research, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

The qualitative paradigm is applicable to this study, which uses a Bourdieuian conceptual framework to understand how individuals describe the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices. The data for this study was collected "in the field at the site where participants experience the problem under study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 45) and, as the researcher, saw me involved in face-to-face engagement with the participants. The data gathering strategies were chosen in order to provide both emic (from the perspective of the

actor within the social group) and etic (from the perspective of the outside observer) viewpoints. This enabled me to describe how teachers think about and view Christian ethos, assessment practices and professional learning within their context, and then analyse and interpret these insider experiences through "experience-distant" methods such as the application of theoretical concepts (Geertz, 1983). Attention to both emic and etic perspectives enabled me to objectively compare the professed ethos of the school with the teachers' lived understandings of assessment practices.

A research methodology is "a model, which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 30). The methodology arises out of the conceptual framework and is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

Gall, Borg and Gall (2007) define qualitative research as

> inquiry that is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational. The dominant methodology is to discover these meanings and interpretations by studying cases intensively in natural settings and subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction. (p. 650)

It is therefore appropriate that the methodology adopted in this research was qualitative case study.

The adopted methodology was chosen because of its capacity to enable exploration and rich description of teachers' habitus and their perspectives on the relationship between Christian ethos, assessment and the broader education field. According to Bourdieu, "…[W]e cannot grasp the dynamics of the field…without a historical, that is, a genetic, analysis of its constitution and of the tensions that exist between positions in it…" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 90). In other words, whilst we can bring certain issues to the light in an empirical way, in order to ensure its general validity, "empiricism must be (and is) mediated by qualitative factors" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 48). For this reason, a qualitative case study which factors in a number of data sources and which examines the constitution of the field and the descriptions of teachers, enabled insights into whether the teachers experience tensions

between the professed ethos of the Christian school and the reality of their practices, specifically their assessment practices, and how they might be supported to overcome these.

4.3 Qualitative Case Study

As a research methodology, case study has commonly been used in psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, medicine and education. Yin (2009) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Stake (2005) considers a case to be an object of study whilst Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009) propose that a case is better understood as a procedure of inquiry. Creswell (2013) draws these definitions together to view case study as "a methodology: a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry" (p. 97) and, for the purpose of this research, this was the adopted definition. This study involved the investigation of a real-life, contemporary, bounded system (one Christian school) through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (document and artefact review and interviews) and reported the case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013). The object of this study was the teachers' perspectives, specifically their perspectives regarding how professional learning can support their assessment practice in the context of one Christian school. The purpose of examining the case being studied in this investigation was to understand how teachers both experience and navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and their assessment practices and how professional learning might support them to do so.

A case study examines particular actors or groups of actors in relation to particular events (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) and generates rich and vivid description, focusing on individuals or groups and their perspectives (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). The goal of case study is to "generalise theories (analytical generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)" (Yin, 2009, p. 15). Case study allows for a contemporary phenomenon to be investigated in its real-life context. The research problem driving this investigation is how teachers can navigate between the underlying (and often competing) worldviews and philosophies of government-mandated policies and structures, parent expectations, teachers' own beliefs and Christian school ethos. The use of case study made it possible to describe, explain and understand patterns related to teachers' experience of the application of Christian ethos in their assessment practices and the role of professional learning in supporting this. Because of its emphasis on context, case study was an appropriate methodology for this

research as it afforded the researcher the opportunity to attain a deep understanding of how 'actors' enact their beliefs within a particular professional context.

4.3.1 Strengths and limitations of case study research

All research designs have their inherent strengths and limitations. A strength of case study is that it "offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance" (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). In the field of education, case study enables examination of practice which can illuminate understanding and potentially inform improvement. In the context of this study, examination of the case provided insights in to how the teachers describe and experience the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practice and the ways in which they perceive that professional learning can support them in navigating this. In turn, this provided an opportunity to make recommendations as to how the application of Christian ethos to assessment practices might be strengthened and improved. Furthermore, the collective or embedded case study can offer insights and meanings that can contribute to the advancement of the field's knowledge base (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). This study, within one Christian school, is able to advance an understanding of the habitus' of the actors and how these intersect with the rules of the field to shape assessment practices.

One of the most cited concerns regarding case study research is the issue of generalisability and the claim that there is little scope to generalise from a single case. In this study, the case was chosen on the basis of its relevance to the research questions and its capacity to shed light on the study's focus: the relationship between espoused Christian ethos and assessment/professional learning practice as examined in the light of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts. Whilst the school in this study does not represent a 'sample', what is learned in this particular setting can be transferred or generalised to similar situations subsequently encountered (Merriam, 2009). It follows, therefore, that case study researchers need to take care not to make generalisations that do not necessarily apply beyond the limited scope of their own inquiry and they need to make clear the extent to which the case may be similar or dissimilar to other potential sites (Stake, 2005). A limitation of this study is that it involves only one school, which means that it will not be possible to generalise beyond this school. Nonetheless, the study can be used as a point of reference for other Christian schools.

Finally, the capacity for case study research to provide quality of illumination (Flyvbjerg, 2006) also makes it appropriate and appealing for this study. Through the use of case study

design in examining the habitus, assessment practice and professional learning experiences of teachers in one bounded context, insight can be gained into the extent to which these teachers' experiences reflect the articulated Christian ethos of the school.

4.3.2 The case study site

In qualitative research, the objective is to conduct an in-depth investigation of a central problem. Therefore, the researcher purposively selects sites and individuals that will best contribute to an understanding of that problem (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative researchers typically collect data at the site where participants experience the problem being investigated. "Qualitative researchers gather up-close information by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context" (Creswell, 2013, p. 45).

In this study the site was purposively chosen as it is a Christian school which fits within the bounded definition as discussed in Chapter 1 and enabled the collection of data which would address the chosen research questions of this study. The site is my own workplace and activities at the site contributed directly to my desire to conduct the study. As well as ease of access for me as the researcher, the site has a strong commitment to the professional learning of teachers, and participants are engaged in an intentional and ongoing internal professional learning program that, at the time of the research, included a reshaping of the school's assessment and reporting procedures. It was felt that these factors would increase the probability that rich, relevant data could be collected.

The school, referred to in this study as Oasis Christian College is a Christian co-educational school, serving 1400 children from Early Learning Centre to Year 12 and has a staff of 100 teachers and approximately 55 non-teaching staff. The school is located within an area of fast-growing urban development in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. The school is 30 years old but over the past 10 years has experienced rapid expansion of infrastructure and growth in student numbers. The school is a member of Christian Schools Australia, which is a national association of Christian schools as outlined in section 1.5.1.

To be employed at Oasis Christian College, staff are required to be practicing, committed Christians. This requirement forms an important part of the recruitment processes and is made explicit in the school mission statement and policies including those pertaining to expectations of staff. All staff are expected to subscribe to a Christian worldview and, furthermore, teachers are expected to espouse this worldview within the context of their work

with students and in the manner in which they interact with members of the school community. Part of the annual performance appraisal incorporates a conversation regarding the teacher's personal faith journey. Whilst each person's habitus and faith life are extremely individual, in the context of this field, it is reasonable to assume that each actor is a professing, practising Christian and, as such, brings with them their personal spiritual resources which may have been gained through participation in their family and/or church community. This study sought to explore how both the teachers' habitus and the institutional ethos are reflected in the practices of assessment and how professional learning might support the teachers in navigating any tensions.

4.4 The Position of the Researcher

Research conducted from within is worthwhile and special because "…it forces us to ground our work in everyday issues as those involved experience them, it confronts us and others with our assumptions, perspectives and their consequences, it enables us to learn, reflect and act and it insists that we engage with what and who we are curious about" (Smyth & Holian, 2008, p. 34).

My leadership role at the school that is the site of this research was significant for the conduct of this study. My 30 years of experience within the Christian schools movement have shaped the assumptions, values and understandings of the specific research questions being investigated and positioned me as an 'insider' researcher. Doing research in one's own setting presents both advantages and challenges and, as such, it was important to consider these at each stage of this study.

Insider research can be defined as "research by complete members of organisational systems and communities in and on their own organisations" (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p. 59) as opposed to being a complete stranger or outsider. However, some writers find the dichotomous nature of this definition somewhat limiting preferring to conceptualise the positioning of the researcher in terms of a continuum (Bilecen, 2014; Mercer, 2007) or broadening the definition of insider/outsider beyond one's situatedness in relation to the organisation under investigation (Acker, 2001; Mercer, 2007). In this study, both my status as a member of the organisation within which the research was conducted, along with my deep interest and engagement in the topic under investigation within the context of this organisation, positioned me as an insider. However, at various points while conducting this

study I moved along the continuum as I employed strategies to enable me to stand back and view the data from a distance.

There are some practical advantages to insider research; one being access to the study site and its participants (Asselin, 2003; Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010; Mercer, 2007). Being known in the organisation under investigation in this study meant that those in authority were supportive of the project, and I had ready access to documentation and participants. Pre-established credibility, trust and rapport meant that the research could be conducted in a fairly free and relaxed manner and created a level of confidence between the parties (Mercer, 2007). My knowledge of the organisation and the sub-field meant a high level of shared language and understanding which also helped the flow of interviews. In this research, I believe that being an insider and being able to leverage off my established relationships led to a higher degree of candour than might otherwise be expected from the participants. This was evidenced, for example, by many responses during interviews where teachers felt comfortable enough to honestly admit their perceived failure in successfully applying Christian ethos to their practice. Respondents did not attempt to 'cover up' either their own shortcomings or those of the school, despite the fact that I hold a leadership role in the school and, at the time of the interviews. The tone of the interviews was generally thoughtful and reflective but there was no sense of respondents 'holding back'.

Questions of validity, reliability and bias are often raised in relation to insider research. However, such questions are reflective of a positivist paradigm of research where objectivity and detachment are prized and generalisation and universal knowledge are the goals. "These approaches are defined primarily by their view that an external reality exists and that an independent, value-free researcher can examine this reality" (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p. 62). By contrast, this study is based on the contention that there is "no objective or single knowable external reality and that the researcher is an integral part of the research process, not separate from it" (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p. 63). My engaged participation in this study's site provided a unique position from which to examine a particular issue in depth and supports the constructionist perspective that we learn about, understand and know the world through our interaction with it. Rather than objectively testing a hypothesis, focusing on predicting results or attempting to generalize to the broader population, this study is about listening to the voices of the participants with the goal of providing a rich description of their experiences. Bourdieu's theoretical tools are used as a way of organising, making sense of and communicating these experiences. For that reason, scientific definitions of validity,

reliability or generalisability cannot be meaningfully applied to this research (Smyth & Holian, 2008). However, that is not to suggest that insider research does not have other potential issues and risks that need to be carefully considered and navigated.

A key consideration in this research was an awareness of my own habitus (beliefs, values and attitudes) and how my 'taken for granted' assumptions might limit my ability to delve for deeper meaning, cause me to overlook important pieces of data (Asselin, 2003) or fail to see the obvious (Costley et al., 2010). As an insider, I faced the danger of myopia and the challenge of trying to make the familiar strange or, as Nielsen and Repstad (1993) describe it, taking the journey from nearness to distance – and back. A key strategy to rise above my 'worm's eye view' (Nielsen & Repstad, 1993) and maintain a critical perspective on the research was to adopt a well-established theoretical lens to frame my research questions, data collection and analysis in order to distance myself from the data and ensure that my own assumptions and worldview would be reflected upon. This enabled me to take the familiar words of my colleagues and the documents of the organisation and attempt to view and understand them through a lens that was removed from my more habituated ways of thinking about the world.

The literature on insider research also cites role duality as a potential issue (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Smyth & Holian, 2008). Role confusion can occur "when the researcher perceives or responds to events or analyses data from a perspective other than a researcher" (Asselin, 2003, p. 102). The strategy adopted to address this was to regularly step back from the data collection and analysis process and monitor my own thoughts, feelings and observations. Discussing researcher notes as well as research data and emerging claims with experienced colleagues outside of the setting, including my doctoral supervisors, was helpful in illuminating gaps and checking that the researcher role was being maintained.

According to Bourdieu (1990b), researchers need to recognise both their own habitus (both personal and academic) along with the position that they occupy in the field (especially in relation to interview participants) and the potential for these to influence the research. What must be objectivised is not (only) the individual who does the research "… but the position [he/she] occupies in academic space and the biases implicated in the view [taken] by virtue of being 'out of the game'" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 70).

In *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu (1999) highlights the importance of the researcher being self-reflexive in relation to the cultural field under investigation and their practice within that field. Webb et.al. (2002) summarise Bourdieu's five reflexive considerations for the researcher:

- Ensure that the project's intentions and procedural principles are made explicit
- Be aware of any elements that may lead interviewees to censor their responses
- Work to overcome the limitations of transcription of interviews
- Interviewers should have an extensive knowledge of the social contexts of their subjects and the interviewer needs to objectify their own position in the field and try to 'forget it' therefore freeing themselves from preconceived notions from their own habitus. (pp. 55-56)

At each stage of this study, I endeavoured to address each of the areas listed above in order to ensure both care and rigour in the data collection and analysis processes. The specific strategies which I employed to do this will be outlined in each of the relevant sections.

4.5 Participants

The Head of Oasis Christian College provided consent for this study to be conducted on the school site. This was done via the Head of College Consent Form (Appendix 2). All teachers in the school were then invited to express interest in participating in this research project. The invitation to participate was not conducted directly by me, but rather by a third party. This served to ensure that ethical integrity was maintained and that I was at arm's length from the process. In January 2016 the Head of College sent an email to all teaching staff to invite them to participate in the research project (Appendix 6). This enabled me, as a leader at Oasis Christian College, to be removed from the initial volunteering phase thus mitigating any pressure on staff to participate. At no time did I speak to staff either formally, informally, in a group or individually regarding the invitation to participate in the interviews for this study. The Head of College or his assistant facilitated all correspondence regarding this.

The email sent to teachers from the Head of College included information regarding the project and outlined the ways in which teachers could be involved. These were:

1. All teachers were asked to give consent for group notes and artefacts created during professional learning and faculty workshops to be used. The consent form was distributed during a whole staff meeting and teachers handed forms back to administration staff as they exited. Administration staff later compiled a spreadsheet, followed up on staff who were absent and forwarded all consent forms to me. Ninety-

eight teachers gave consent and six teachers declined to give consent or did not return the form. Any notes or artefacts that were generated by these teachers who had not given consent or by groups of which they were a part, were excluded from the data set.

2. Individual teacher interviews
3. School leader focus group

Those who agreed to participate in interviews or the focus group were asked to email their interest to the Head of College's Personal Assistant who then forwarded the list to me once the deadline for registering interest had passed. Seventeen teachers volunteered their participation in individual interviews. From this group, two teachers were chosen for the pilot interviews and a further eleven were purposively selected for interview. Only teachers who volunteered as a result of the initial invitation were considered for participation in the study.

Purposive sampling is when researchers intentionally seek out "groups, settings and individuals where … the processes being studied are most likely to occur" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 202). It involves the selection of cases or individuals that will offer insights and in-depth understandings into issues which are central to the purpose of the research study (Patton, 2002) and which will best help the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2012). In order to understand and gain insight into how teachers at Oasis Christian College experience the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices, the goal was to choose a sample from which the most could be learned.

A key pre-requisite for purposive sampling is a set of selection criteria that "directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). The criteria in this study largely centred on the selection of participants whose roles may require reconciliation of potentially competing demands in relation to 'educating the whole child' within the broader context of school education which privileges academic achievement. Purposive selection of teachers to participate in interviews in this study included the following criteria. Where possible, teachers at Year 3/5/7/9 were selected. This was pertinent given that the interviews took place just after the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing cycle. NAPLAN is a government mandated annual assessment for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It comprises of a series of tests that cover skills in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. Given that NAPLAN testing represents a potential site of tension and this would be fresh in teachers' minds, I was interested to see whether teachers spoke about NAPLAN in the interviews.

Teachers at the Senior levels (Year 11 and 12) were also selected. Given the enormous influence of the assessment regimes associated with the Victorian Certificate of Education on learning and teaching practices, I posited that these teachers had a greater potential of experiencing tensions between ethos and assessment practices. A number of teachers who volunteered taught across both Christian Studies as well as other key learning areas. Through their involvement in Christian Studies, the Chapel program and a range of extra-curricular activities such as Missions Trips, these teachers had demonstrated high levels of buy-in to the Christian ethos of the College. I therefore assumed that they may provide meaningful feedback. Teachers who had previously demonstrated that they 'had something to say' on the research topic were also selected. This was judged by their feedback and participation in other forums such as professional learning workshops, staff meetings and one on one conversations with me.

The breakdown of interview participants according to gender and section of the school were:

School section	**Male**	**Female**
Junior School (Year P-4)	1	1
Middle School (Year 5-8)	1	2
Senior School (Year 9-12)	2	4
Specialist Staff	0	2

The timing of the interviews in this study was also given consideration. The interviews took place over a six week period in May and June of 2016. This was just after National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing and during the period of Senior School (Year 9-12) exams. Also, the period in question coincided with the school cycle of end of semester assessments and report writing. This time-frame was chosen in order to capitalise on the fact that teachers were highly engaged in assessment practices at this time and might therefore be more thoughtfully reflective on the topic.

In addition to the teachers who volunteered for the individual interviews, four executive leaders volunteered to participate in the school leader focus group interview. However, it was later decided not to proceed with the focus group interview. This was in part due to the high volume of data generated through the individual interviews, which meant that I reached data saturation in relation to my research questions. In addition, however, none of the executive leaders who volunteered for the interview had direct and current experience in relation to the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practice due to the fact that none of them

were engaged in classroom teaching at the time. This could therefore, have resulted in them sharing second-hand experiences or their own experiences from previous positions or schools. It was felt, therefore, that there was little to be gained from proceeding with this interview.

4.6 Data Collection and Analysis: Documents and Artefacts

In the context of this study, documents were used as a source of rich description regarding how those who produced the documents think about Christian education, teaching and learning and assessment within the context of Oasis Christian College. The documents, which purport to capture the school's espoused ideals around Christian ethos were used as background information to inform interview questions and as a reference point for understanding the school's espoused Christian ethos. Documents were examined in order to look for evidence of the espoused underpinning assumptions around the orthodoxy (namely the Christian ethos) which might shape and influence practices within the field. This then served as a stimulus in interviews and data analysis, enabling me to explore whether the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers themselves were aligned with the official discourse of the College. This was explored predominantly through the first of the interview questions: *The College mission statement of HCC states that "the gospel message is an integral part of all we do". What does that mean for you?*

Documents are a valuable source of information in qualitative research and can take a variety of forms including public, private and audio-visual (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The documents chosen for analysis in this study provided information about the "official perspective" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 137) of Christian ethos and teaching and learning at the school. A number of key documents were accessed. The school had recently stopped producing a hard copy, glossy prospectus instead opting to maximise its online presence and the capacity to easily update information in that medium. The pages and subpages of the website that were included for analysis were:

Executive Principal's welcome
College Overview
Community Overview
Guiding Principles
Christian Expression (and History)
Curriculum
Student Achievement

These pages were chosen because they were deemed to provide the most information about the 'official' discourse around Christian ethos, teaching and learning and curriculum therefore enabling description of the underpinning assumptions and values of the College. Whilst there are a number of other web pages, in the interests of keeping the analysis manageable, it was confined to the key pages as listed above. In addition to the web pages the following documents were also subject to analysis: the Constitution (including Statement of Faith), the most recent Annual Report, the Learning and Teaching policy and the Assessment policy.

Interrogation of these documents provided evidence of the professed values and ways of thinking which underpin both the Christian ethos of the College as well as its practices and the manner in which these interconnect. The documents enabled me to describe the 'official perspective' or the 'rules of the game' in this field. This could then be compared with the perspectives of the actors within this field in order to determine the nature of the alignment between the professed and lived practices.

Documentary data does have limitations. Documents are not developed for research purposes and therefore are not able to provide complete answers to the research questions. (Merriam, 2009). However, by analysing them in terms of identified concepts these documents provided an understanding of the nuances of the school's espoused beliefs.

Notes and artefacts from school-based teacher professional learning sessions held in early 2016 were also collected and analysed in this study. These included: group notes from workshop discussions, written teacher reflections and feedback regarding professional learning sessions, minutes from team workshops and assessment rubrics. All teachers across the school engaged in these professional learning workshops but documents and artefacts were only gathered from teams where all teachers within that team had provided written consent. These collaboratively developed documents and artefacts were then analysed for key themes, which in turn were used as a stimulus in the semi-structured individual interviews with teachers.

A deductive approach was adopted to analysis of the documents and artefacts whereby the documents were initially coded according to a priori concepts derived from Bourdieu's framework, the literature, and the research questions themselves. These sensitising concepts included: habitus, field, capital, tension, Christian ethos, community, discipleship, professional learning, each of the characteristics of professional learning and assessment.

Added to this were themes that were identified in the data itself. Analysis was done by systematically reading and re-reading through them, making margin notes, colour coding the themes and then transferring relevant words and phrases to spreadsheets. The analysis of the artefacts and teacher notes was done on electronic documents. All of the website data were transferred to word documents. Initial data analysis was done by hand on paper copies by coding in margins and colour coding sections of text using highlighters. Codes were then transferred to spreadsheets along with key segments of text where further synthesis took place. This process enabled for coded data to be decontextualized from its original source and recontextualised into new categories and themes. The analysis of the documents and artefacts was completed prior to the interviews and the identified themes were then used to inform analysis of the interviews. Additionally, key quotes from this data set were used as prompts during the interviews. (Appendix 7)

4.7 Data Collection and Analysis: Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were a key data collection strategy in this study and this section justifies and explains their use. The interview is the process whereby the researcher and participant engage in conversation that is focused on questions which are related to the research study (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing enables the researcher to engage with the perspective of the other and to access people's ideas, thoughts, and experiences in their own words and from their point of view from, rather than in, the words of the researcher (Bourdieu, 1999; Creswell, 2012; Kvale, 2007; Silverman, 2013). Kvale (2007) describes the interview as "a conversation that has a structure and a purpose" and refers to a type of interview he terms the "semi-structured life world interview" (p. 7). For the purposes of this study, the interview is defined as:

> …a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions. (Kvale, 2007, p. 9)

In particular, the interviews in this research sought to elicit descriptions of teachers' experiences of the relationship between Christian ethos into assessment practices in the context of one Christian school and their thoughts about how professional learning might support them. Through the interviews, I was able to explore teachers' habitus with respect to their understanding of the College's espoused Christian ethos, their beliefs and values in relation to assessment and the manner in which they experienced alignment, or not, between College ethos and assessment practices. The interviews allowed me to seek clarification of and further explore issues raised in the document analysis and to gather rich description of

how teachers make sense of the practices of the field. With the permission of the participants, the semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. As a courtesy and in order to ensure ethical practice, a copy of the interview transcript was returned to each participant in order for them to validate the data as an accurate record of the interview. Participants were also invited to make any further comments if they so wished but none did other than to confirm that the transcripts were accurate.

As interviews can serve a range of purposes it is important to structure them in a way that is consistent with the research questions under investigation. In this investigation, the interviews were semi-structured, individual interviews and were conducted face-to-face. This allowed the participants to tell their own story and for the interviewer to "perceive and monitor, *on the spot*" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 608 emphasis in the original). The semi-structured interview allows opportunities for the participant to answer the questions provided by the interviewer, to expand upon those answers and to potentially link other topics to the topic of the interview. They also allow the interviewer to probe in order to facilitate the kind of in-depth reflection required for rich data and in a manner that enables understanding of the meaning of the subjects' description of their lived world (Kvale, 2007). Conducting the interviews face to face enables informal communication and for the researcher to pick up on any subtleties of non-verbal communication.

Bourdieu (1999) claimed that the worth of the interview questions would be determined if they allowed the researcher to see the world of his or her participants as they saw it. Consequently, the focus when constructing the interview questions for this study was to try and gain some understanding of the world of the teachers and their praxis in the field of Christian schooling, particularly in relation to Christian ethos, assessment and professional learning.

According to Kvale, interview questions should "promote a positive interaction, keep the flow of the conversation going, and stimulate the subjects to talk about their experiences and feelings" (Kvale, 2007, p. 58). He also asserts the importance of interview questions being in plain, accessible language in order to generate rich and spontaneous responses. In semi-structured interviews, questions are used flexibly and neither their wording nor their order are entirely predetermined (Merriam, 2009). In formulating the interview questions in this study, I was aware of the need to obtain the kind of descriptions that would elicit relevant and

reliable material that would, in turn, enable me to later draw interpretations through my theoretical and thematic lenses.

Initially, four open-ended interview questions were chosen and a list of prompts created. The prompts are listed in Appendix 7. The research questions, along with relevant themes identified from the document and artefact analysis, provided the framework for the semi-structured interview questions. The prompts took the form of quotes taken from feedback provided from earlier teacher professional learning sessions. The specific quotes were chosen because they reflected teacher views regarding the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment. Some of these prompts were used as required in the interviews in order to keep the discussion flowing. After conducting pilot interviews (see section 4.7.1 below), one interview question was modified. Appendix 8 outlines both the initial and the final interview questions along with the key purpose for each question.

4.7.1 Pilot interviews

A number of researchers (Creswell, 2012; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2009) recommend pilot testing as a way of refining the research questions and procedures and assessing bias. In this study, two pilot interviews were conducted in May 2016. The purpose was essentially to trial the interview questions and also to familiarise myself with the interview process and hone my skill. These interviews were most helpful in enabling me to reflect further on both the interview questions and the interview process itself.

As a result of the pilot interviews, I felt that the third interview question needed to be changed. The original question was:

In thinking about the professional learning that you engaged in during Term 1 (provide reminders):

> *a) What tensions or questions, if any, arose for you personally or for the group during these sessions?*
>
> *b) Have you been able to negotiate and resolve these? If so, how?*

My first concern with this question was that I was asking teachers to recall sessions and conversations that had occurred three months earlier. Whilst I felt that I could rely on teachers remembering the general content of these sessions and the activities, I realised that expecting them to recall their thoughts and/or those of others at the time was probably unrealistic.

Furthermore, I realised that it was not necessary or even helpful for me to know what each teacher's thoughts and beliefs were retrospectively. Rather, their thoughts and beliefs shared spontaneously at the point of interview would be far more relevant in terms of revealing their habitus. In addition, during the pilot interviews I felt that that by reminding participants of all of the previous professional learning sessions, I was really giving them carte blanche to speak about whatever they remembered most or first thus creating the potential for the conversation to lose focus.

The second issue with this question was about the language used, in particular the word *tension.* Whilst this word is reflective of the underlying Bourdieuian conceptual framework, I become conscious that there was risk of theoretical language potentially getting in the way and confusing meaning and/or negatively impacting the flow of the interview. I realised that asking participants about what *tensions* arose could be perceived as asking them whether there were arguments. I needed to ensure that questions both contributed "thematically to knowledge production and also dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction" (Kvale, 2007, p. 57). Therefore, I felt it important to change the wording of this question in order to ensure plain, accessible language, to avoid any confusion and to keep the interview focused.

After careful consideration, an alternate Question 3 was developed:
How well do you feel that Christian ethos and College goals are reflected in the College's current assessment and reporting practices?

I felt that this question was more targeted and would therefore help to ensure that interviewee's responses were more focused towards the issues under investigation. In reframing the question, I was careful to ensure it focused on ethos and goals first and assessment practices second in line with the focus of the research ensuring that the object of analysis was prioritised.

The second key reflection on the pilot interviews concerned the interview process itself including both technique and the potential for unwanted researcher influence on responses. Questions that arose for me after conducting the pilot interviews included:

- How can I delve more deeply into interviewee's responses without steering them towards a conclusion?

- What is a good strategy to use when someone appears not to understand a question? How long do you let them go? Where is the line between 'this is their answer and therefore this is the research' and 'maybe they didn't quite understand and I need to try and ask the question a different way to give them another chance to respond?

In terms of interview technique, I became of aware of the need to effectively use probes during the interviews. Probes are follow up questions asked by the researcher in order to draw out further information, to bring clarification or to encourage the interviewee to elaborate further or provide more detail (Creswell, 2012). Whilst often the probe questions were influenced by my own insider perspectives which enabled me to really focus the conversation in order to glean rich data, at the same time they contributed to ensuring that the participant's voices (and not my own assumptions) were highlighted. Subsequent to the pilot interviews I developed a number of probes which I could use in the interviews and throughout the interview period I became more adept at developing these on the spot. The probes took the form of simple questions such as:

"Can you unpack that a little more for me?"
"What do you mean by…?"
"How do you feel about that?"

Example: Probing for in-depth understanding during and in-depth, individual interview

Respondent:	Well you could take any of our assessments and put it in a government school and they wouldn't have any issues with it, that's what I mean.
Interviewer:	So how do you feel about that?
Respondent:	Thinking about it now I think it's a shame. I think we should be doing … like there should be a difference.
Interviewer:	So what should the difference be do you think?

4.7.2 Interviews and researcher relationship

Interviews are a particular type of dialogue that is different from other conversations. Kvale describes the research interview as "an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between two people… who reciprocally influence one another (Kvale, 2007, p. 14). In this study, it was necessary to consider the relationship between myself as researcher and the participants, along with issues that arise from 'insider' research.

In a study such as this one where interviewer and interviewee know each other, there is potential for this to adversely influence the research data and therefore the relationship between interviewer and interviewee needs to be reflected upon (Creswell, 2013). Glesne (2006) also highlights the possibility of friendship affecting the behaviour of interviewers or participants in a way that could compromise the trustworthiness of the process. This is something that I considered in the conduct of this research, particularly given the fact that I am both known to the participants and had a position of leadership over them, some directly. However, as Kvale points out, it must be recognised that regardless of relationship, "A professional research interview is not an egalitarian dialogue among equal partners, but entails a specific power asymmetry where the interviewer sets the stage for the interview, controls the sequence, and uses the outcome for his or her purposes" (Kvale, 2007, p. 22).

In this study, the relationship between researcher and participants would be best described as a 'professional friendship' as opposed to 'personal'. At all times, I was mindful of both the closeness and the distance of my relationship. The use of formal written statements regarding the purpose of the research, the use of consent forms, conducting the interviews in the College's designated 'interview rooms' were practical ways that aided me in adopting a 'researcher' as opposed to 'colleague' relationship. In order to counteract any potential issues of power or status, I was also mindful of how participants were positioned in the physical space during the interviews, the way that the interview questions were framed and the tone that I used in asking them.

However, whilst acknowledging that the process was a formal interview, I none-the-less tried to capitalise on my insider position by conducting the interview as a professional conversation similar to the kinds of professional conversations I might otherwise have with the participants. I believe the fact that I regularly do engage in professional conversations with these teachers and that this has become a part of school culture, greatly aided in diminishing status and power issues. I endeavoured to ensure that participants felt at ease and comfortable in the interview by reaffirming the purpose of the interview and expressing my gratitude for their participation at the commencement of the interview (and reiterating this at the end once the recording was switched off) and sending signals (for example through smiling, nodding and the use of the word 'yes') that affirmed that I was genuinely seeking their personal views as opposed to a 'right answer' and that I greatly valued hearing their thoughts.

During the interviews for this study, I felt that all of the participants were very open in the way they shared and demonstrated a high level of trust in the process. I attribute this largely to my role as an 'insider' and my prior relationship with the respondents. Despite the fact that I hold a position of power within the organisation, I believe that the potential limitations of this were largely mitigated by the strength of the relationships which enabled the interview conversations to occur more naturally and engendered in the participants a confidence to be completely honest due to their perspective that I would understand their thoughts, particularly when they were being critical or questioning of practices. When talking about their experiences and their beliefs, participants often referred to 'our school' or 'we' and told their stories in a way that assumed that I would be able to relate to them. Having a shared internal jargon and an understanding of the school culture also aided this.

None-the-less, when conducting the interviews, I was mindful of the potential for my role duality to impact participant responses. The subject of integration of Christian ethos into College practices was one which I, in my role as Head of Learning and Teaching, had been very vocal on for six to twelve months prior to the interview and so it is quite possible that this impacted what the respondents chose to tell me although there is no way of telling exactly how. Certainly, during the interviews, I was conscious of the potential for role confusion and actively sought not to reveal my own experiences or thoughts. I was aware of trying to keep my 'self' out of the interview, of limiting my own contributions and of employing 'wait time' in order to privilege what was being shared by the participants. Like Justine Mercer in her insider research at two Higher Education institutions, I also found that I had to adopt an interview style that was "less gregarious than my natural disposition" (Mercer, 2007, p. 11). Indeed, I think the fact that I spoke sparingly throughout the interviews would have strengthened the perspective that I was in the role of researcher and not Head of Learning and Teaching.

4.7.3 Analysis of semi-structured interviews

In this study, a sequential and iterative approach to data analysis was employed which involved me moving back and forth between data sets. The goal of this research was to describe how teachers experience, think about and navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices and their perspectives regarding how professional learning approaches may support them in this. Data analysis sought to interpret these insider experiences through the use of "experience-distant" strategies such as the application of theoretical concepts (Geertz, 1983). In this section I will outline the data analysis process

which I followed. I will give an account of my thinking and decision making throughout the process and show the relationship between the data analysis approach and Bourdieu's theoretical tools.

My first step towards analysis of the interview data was to organise the data by having the interviews transcribed and then adding line numbers. These formatted interviews were printed with wide margins so that notes, memos and later codes, could be recorded onto hard copies. I then read and re-read through the interview transcripts a few times to obtain a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2012). During this exploratory stage, I made some initial memos in the margins – mainly looking for key ideas but these were reflective of the sensitising concepts as well as noting key responses to each of the interview questions. I then wrote a one-page summary for each interview, giving each interview a title. These summaries attempted to capture my initial thoughts regarding the key ideas in each interview. A sample of one of these interview summaries is provided in Appendix 10. On a separate document, I listed some of the initial key ideas from each of the interviews and added some reflective notes as well as supporting quotes that I cut and pasted from the interview transcripts. This process prompted the identifying of some recurring themes across the data set as a whole. This initial approach to the analysis of the interviews served to further familiarise myself with the data, to focus on the key points and ideas raised in each interview and to get a "sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (Agar, 1980, p. 103). My next step was to venture into the process of generating analytical codes and categories in order to more systematically and thoroughly capture the themes of the data.

Coding has been described as the "critical link between data collection and their explanation of meaning" (Soldana, 2016, p. 4). The purpose of coding is to capture the essence of the data by separating, assembling, restructuring and connecting data in order to establish meaning and develop understanding. Coding enables the researcher to "search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (Bernard, 2011, p. 338).

The first goal was to consider how I was going to approach the coding and analysis of the data in such a way that aligned with my theoretical framework (Crotty, 1998). From the outset, I wanted to ensure that the lenses being applied to my data and the approaches to analysis reflected a strong relationship with both the purpose of the research. The use of Bourdieu's thinking tools of field, habitus and capital as a lens also aided me, as an insider, to 'forget' my

own position and free myself from the preconceived notions of my own habitus (Webb et al., 2002).

Working at the start with just one interview transcript as a pilot, I decided to apply an initial method of coding to the data that I would describe as intuitive, thematic coding. The interview data selected for this initial analysis were chosen firstly because my insider knowledge meant that I knew that John, a senior school teacher and faculty leader had already thought deeply around the types of questions I had raised in the interview. In addition, my intuition was that his responses had provided rich data that connected strongly with the research questions. With a set of guiding questions and a priori concepts in mind, I worked through the transcript *line-by-line* (Charmaz, 2006) looking for key ideas and themes in the data (Creswell, 2013). These guiding questions were:

What is being talked about?

How does the respondent talk about, understand and characterise what is going on?

What assumptions are being made?

What questions does the data generate?

What surprises me about the data?

How can Bourdieu's thinking tools of field, habitus and capital be applied to the data?

The data were coded manually by writing in the margin of the transcript. I then typed these codes in a word document and cut and pasted them into organised categories. The next step was to add further analytic memos using the comment feature in Word. This coding generated a number of themes, some of which I had not previously thought about and so this was a really important development of my analytical heuristic. This process enabled me to identify some themes that, as an insider researcher, had not been at the forefront of my thinking. One example of a theme that emerged from this initial data analysis, which I had not previously given great consideration, was in relation to John's particular concern around wanting to meet the expectations of those who provide school funding (parents and government) and the conflict experienced when these expectations did not line up with the College mission.

John: However, there are problems even then and this is where I get conflicted a bit, is … I was thinking about this, especially when we're talking about assessment and reporting. Also, I wonder what … what are we getting paid, or who is giving us money and what are they

expecting from us as well? Because I think that's where we run into one conflict.

Interviewer: Well, who is giving us money?

John: Well the parents are giving us money but are they looking at it that that's what they're expecting? I know that's our mission statement but is that what they're expecting when they give us the money? (John 50-65)

Whilst the thematic coding was helpful in highlighting key issues, I was also interested with this initial transcript to trial an alternative method of coding which would help to bring greater focus to the analysis and foreground tensions. The second coding method that I applied to the data was *Versus Coding.* "Versus Codes identify in dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organisations, phenomena, processes, concepts etc. in direct conflict with each other" (Soldana, 2016, p. 137). Given that a key purpose of this study was to understand how teachers in one Christian school experience tensions in their integration of Christian ethos into practice and that Bourdieu's view of social existence is essentially characterized by contention and competition with individuals operating within arenas of struggle *(fields),* an analytic tool with the potential to highlight dichotomies and patterns of struggle seemed highly appropriate.

Versus Coding involves working through the data set and identifying dichotomies both actual and conceptual. Using the same hard copy transcript, I wrote the Versus Codes in the remaining margin (See Appendix 11 for example) and then typed them up. I then endeavoured to categorise the initial versus codes by comparing and sorting them (i.e. cutting and pasting on a Word document). This produced several categories which served to make more distinct the tensions at hand (Soldana, 2016) and identify the way in which John moved between autonomous and heteronomous poles within the field in order to "negotiate the various forces and imperatives with which they are confronted" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 109).

However, whilst the *Versus Coding* (Soldana, 2016) was helpful in focusing my attention on tensions, for the remainder of the transcripts I applied only thematic coding. The reason for this was that I did not want my initial analysis to force my data into dichotomies. However, in the later stages of analysis I did find the application of 'versus' thinking helpful in the development of key themes.

The iterative and conceptual meaning-making and *data reduction* (Miles & Huberman, 1994) continued with the coding of all of the interviews using the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967). This meant that as each interview was analysed and coded comparisons were made with data already coded. This systematic process sought to identify units of meaning within the data set (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As units of meaning and concepts were identified, I was able to cluster and group them leading to the establishment of categories and sub-categories. This process was done manually and involved continually moving back and forth between the raw data, the codes and categories. Once I had consolidated the codes and categories, I then created a Word document for each one. These documents comprised of a table, which included key quotes from the interviews listing the participant's name and transcript lines as well as a column where I could record any key notes or memos.

Creswell (2013) describes themes as "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 186). At the same time that I was working on consolidating the codes and categories, I was also conceptually brainstorming themes and relationships between themes. Essentially this took the form of shuffling and reshuffling small pieces of paper around on my dining room table and working and re-working conceptual diagrams on a large whiteboard. The final themes were organised logically around the two research questions and the following two chapters will outline and elaborate these.

4.8 Trustworthiness and Dependability

A key concern of all research inquiry involves critical issues relating to the trustworthiness and dependability of the research being undertaken, although approaches and strategies to achieve this vary considerably (Creswell, 2013). These issues are given careful attention during the study's conceptualisation, data collection, analysis and interpretation. The imperative of matching research findings to research questions and "the way things really are" (Merriam, 2009, p.210) is foundational to any trustworthy, credible and believable qualitative research inquiry (Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Internal validity within a qualitative case study is concerned with how congruent the research findings are with reality. Qualitative research investigates people's (both the participant's and the researcher's) constructions of reality – how they understand the world (Merriam, 2009). The researcher's goal is to employ strategies that will both diminish researcher bias and

increase the "correspondence between the research and the real world" (Wolcott, 2005, p. 160). Three key strategies to reduce researcher bias were employed in this study.

Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). "When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). In this study, the integrity of the data, the themes developed and the inferences made was strengthened through the corroboration of documents, artefacts and interview transcripts.

Secondly, transcripts of all interviews in this study were made available to the participants for member checking and verification. The process of having participants check the accuracy of accounts helps to ensure that the unfolding story is representative of the lived "reality" of the actors involved in the study (Stake, 2005). "This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way to identify your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Member checking assisted me in maintaining a position of neutrality by providing an opportunity for participants to clarify or retract comments.

Reflexivity refers to "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). Several strategies assisted me to adopt a reflexive process whereby my biases and assumptions were explored and critiqued. One of these was the use of journals and analytic memos. I wrote journal entries and memos after interviews, after professional learning sessions and at various points through the data analysis process. The use of memos and journals helped me to think critically about the data itself and the meaning I was making from it. Conversations with colleagues who were removed from the project as well as with my supervisors, also assisted me in identifying my own predispositions and being able to think about the data from perspectives that I might not otherwise have done.

In terms of dependability, the underlying question is whether the process is reliable over time, and the process remains stable across the investigation components, instruments, processes and methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure dependability I made use of an audit trail

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994). "In order for an audit to take place, the investigator must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 1998, p. 172). This approach required that records and memos were kept during all phases of the research.

In addition, all aspects of the decision making process were explicitly discussed with the research supervisor and co-supervisor who provided a form of external accountability thus ensuring a clear audit trail existed for this research project.

4.9 Ethical Issues

A case study of a contemporary problem in a real-life context requires the researcher to employ important ethical practices. The researcher is responsible for conducting the research with care and sensitivity and in a manner that protects both the participants and the researcher (Yin, 2009, p. 73). This research was conducted in accordance with the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and according to ethics approval confirmed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 1). The ethical considerations for this study centre on the relationship between myself as the researcher, and the participants.

My ethical obligations as the researcher were initially established with the participants through the Participant Information Letter (Appendix 3). This letter explained the purposes of the research, the duration of the investigation and the extent of the participant's involvement, the research instruments to be utilised, information about how the data would be kept, assurances of confidentiality, the potential risks/benefits to the participants, and the means by which they can gain further information about the project (Thomas, 2009).
Participants were advised in this letter that, whilst efforts would be made to protect the confidentiality of each participant through the use of pseudonyms, complete anonymity of participant data could not be guaranteed. Steps taken to protect the identity of the participants included the allocation of random pseudonyms and member checking which allowed participants to play a role in ensuring that their contribution is not recognisable to readers located in or out of the research context. In addition, names of participants were not shared with any other people in or outside of the school. Participant involvement was sought on a voluntary basis. The teachers who were interviewed opted to participate in the process via a written consent form (Appendices 4 and 5).

The name of the school in which this study was conducted was also disguised with the use of a pseudonym. However, as the thesis makes it clear that the study was conducted in my own workplace; the identity of the school can be traced. The leadership of the College were aware of this upon signing the Head of College Consent Form. At all times, I have endeavoured to conduct this research with integrity and in a manner that is respectful of both the participants and the school.

4.10 Conclusion

The preceding discussion justifies the strategies and methods that were employed in this research. These reflect the constructionist epistemology underpinning this research and draw on the Bourdieuian conceptual framework which informs the research design, data collection and analysis. Case study methodology, supported by thematic analysis, complements the research design in an integrated way. Throughout, two specific research questions focused the design:

1. *How do teachers at Oasis Christian College describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?*
2. *How do teachers at Oasis Christian College perceive the value of various forms of professional learning in supporting them to navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices?*

The following two chapters outline and discuss the research findings of this study. Chapter 5 focuses on the findings in relation to the first research question providing description and interpretation of what the teachers told me about the relationship between the espoused philosophy of Oasis Christian College, the broader education field and the school's assessment practices. Chapter 6 illuminates and analyses the teachers' perspectives regarding how professional learning might support them in negotiating the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices within the context of their school, thus addressing the second research question.

Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion – Research Question 1

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers at Oasis Christian College perceive the relationship between the school's espoused Christian ethos and its practice in relation to assessment and then to explore how professional learning might support teachers as they navigate this relationship. According to Bourdieu (1990b) fields shape the habitus and in turn the habitus shapes the field and within each field, individuals and institutions struggle over forms of capital particular to the field in question (Rey, 2004). This study is interested in this struggle for capital in the context of one Christian school and the way in which an individual's faith habitus is both shaped by and influences the practices in that setting.

In this first of two findings and discussion chapters, I describe and interpret what the teachers told me about the relationship between the school's philosophy and the reality of assessment practices at Oasis Christian College. Looking across the data set as a whole, I claim that teachers experience this relationship as one of tension and struggle. Underpinning this struggle are competing systems of beliefs, values and purposes in relation to the learner, education and, in turn, assessment. I argue that the teachers of Oasis Christian College struggle between the opposing forces of two fields.

Bourdieu conceptualised fields as social spaces made up of opposing forces or poles: "At the one pole, the economically or temporally dominant and culturally dominated positions, and at the other, the culturally dominant and economically dominated positions" (Bourdieu as cited in Grenfell, 2014, p. 70). Whilst both economic and cultural capital together are advantageous in the field of power, Bourdieu recognised a tension between them and furthermore maintained that all subfields, and the institutions within them, are dominated by the economic field (Bourdieu, 1990a). As is reflected in the interviews, some of the teachers at Oasis Christian College articulated this struggle between economic and cultural capital. Furthermore, it was seen as a struggle that they did not know how to resolve.

On the basis of my analysis, I contend that a dynamic struggle is waged between the sub-field of Christian education and the broader educational field. On the one hand, the school and the individual teachers themselves have a goal to ensure that the gospel message is an integral part of all they do (Oasis Christian College Vision Statement). The school seeks to foster a faith habitus within its students and its official documentation places a high value on the

cultivation of spiritual resources. On the other hand are competing worldviews, government policies, parent expectations and the teachers' own education habitus. In this chapter, I outline these arenas of contestation and, in doing so, answer the first research question:
Research Question 1: How do teachers at Oasis Christian College describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?
An understanding of the nature of the existing tensions will then provide a basis for the following chapter, which will explore how professional learning can support teachers in negotiating this struggle.

Oasis Christian College is an institution that exists within what Bourdieu describes as a field or "structured space of forces and struggles into which individuals along with their habitus-specific dispositions enter" (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 161). Whilst fields do have their own orthodoxies, they are at the same time influenced by their convergence with other fields (Webb et al., 2002). This chapter will explore the relationship between Oasis Christian College (which exists within the sub-field of Christian education) and the rules, assumptions and beliefs of the broader education field along with the agency of the individual habitus in order to understand how these combine to shape the specific assessment practices within this one institution.

The teachers of Oasis Christian College find themselves navigating the opposing forces or poles between the two fields that they inhabit. For many of the teachers who were interviewed, this struggle is very personal and one which they have spent much time reflecting on and wanting to resolve. For others, the tension may not have been at the forefront of their thinking, but certainly became more profound as a result of the opportunity to reflect during the interview process itself.

In the first section of this chapter (Section 5.2) I outline what the teachers had to say about the world of the school with its underpinning Christian ethos. Their responses are considered in view of the school's own official discourse in relation to its philosophy and ethos as communicated on its website and in key documents. In this section, I highlight the level of congruence between the school's official documentation of its ethos and the teachers' own understanding of Christian ethos within the school context. Description of the school's Christian ethos and how the teachers perceive it is organised into four themes:

- The view of the learner
- Biblical human flourishing

- Curriculum and pedagogy
- Embodiment of the gospel and religious practices

In Section 5.3 I then juxtapose what the teachers had to say about the school's Christian ethos with the teachers' perspectives of the world of the broader education field with its underpinnings of industrialism and late capitalism. I suggest that the struggles the teachers experience at the junction between the Christian education sub-field and the broader field of education occur across four dimensions. I identify these as:

- The 'system'
- Economic pressures
- Parent expectations
- The teachers' habitus

In drilling down further to explore how these struggles play out specifically in relation to assessment at Oasis Christian College, the teachers repeatedly returned to five themes. These will be discussed in Section 5.4 of this chapter:

- Mixed messages
- Achievement and results versus holistic growth
- Assessment of academics versus assessment of attributes
- Christian ethos - compartmentalised versus integrated
- Individualised competitiveness versus learning in community

5.2 Christian ethos at Oasis Christian College

This section describes how the interview respondents articulated their understanding of the underpinning ethos of the school. I contend that their responses resonate with both the espoused ethos of the College and with the broader body of literature around the goals of Christian education.

Before looking at the perspectives of the teachers, it was important to examine the school's official discourse in relation to Christian ethos and the way in which this ethos purports to shape practices. The *Oasis Christian College Constitution and Statement of Faith*, along with key website pages, make clear the school's undergirding ontology and epistemology, which is grounded in the core doctrines of Christian theology. This is well encapsulated in the *Constitution* that states, "In order to understand the world, humanity and history, they must be

seen in relationship to God as the Bible speaks of it" (Oasis Christian College Constitution, 2013, p. 8).

In their interviews, the participating teachers were asked to describe their understanding of the school's philosophy and ethos through the question: *The mission statement of Oasis Christian College states, "the gospel message is an integral part of all we do". What does that mean for you?*

Lyndell provided a representative summary of the overall responses to this question when she said:

> *Well, to me it means that [the gospel] is not … siloed off somewhere else, you know, in a lesson, in a Christian studies lesson or it's not restricted to staff devotions in the morning, but it's actually … it's the belief that drives everything that happens in the College. So everything, every decision, every part of the curriculum will come back to that point and/or be formed from that point and moved from there. So it's the foundation over everything that will happen.*
>
> *It's not necessarily just that we do Christian studies or that the kids do devotions in the morning, but it's spread right through in everything. So in terms of behaviour and how we handle that, how we operate at a board level decision-making processes; everything is done with that Biblical framework, from the Biblical worldview. Conflict resolution, the pedagogy that we use, how we assess; everything would come back to that Biblical worldview. So you couldn't actually isolate it and go, "Oh, it appears there, there and there," but it's … it's … infiltrated right through everything…[It's about] knowing where kids are at and, in terms of a Christian perspective, it comes back to every child is uniquely formed and has a unique purpose.* (Lyndell, 13-32)

Lyndell's response, which covers a number of key themes, echoes the official discourse of the school as outlined on its website and in key documents such as the *Vision and Mission Statements* and *Constitution.* The following section elaborates on these key themes to illustrate alignment between the teachers' understanding of the school's ethos and philosophy and the school's official articulation of these.

5.2.1 The view of the learner

The Oasis Christian College website espouses a clear view of each learner as created in the image of God and as possessing unique gifts. Furthermore, the school expresses a commitment to value, develop and nurture each individual's gifts in a way that will enable

each student to "have a positive impact on the community" (Oasis website). The role of the school, according to the *Constitution,* is to dedicate itself to developing each individual's gifts and talents and to provide encouragement and opportunity for each one to use their gifts "rather than the squeezing of students into a specific mould" (Oasis Christian College Constitution, 2013, p. 6). Other documents on the website support this notion by stating the importance of "catering for different learning styles and abilities", "striving to bring out the best in each student" and ensuring that "all students have equitable access to learning".

The school declares a commitment to the development of the whole child: their faith, their character and their God-given abilities. This notion of instilling standards in students and of inculcating values which "uphold the character we want" suggest that the school is very much in the business of habitus formation. The school seeks, through its relationships, practices and curriculum to promote a "system of shared beliefs, attitudes and inclinations" (Ladwig, 1994, p. 347) which are firmly based on biblical principles. This view of the learner was also very strongly articulated by the teachers who were interviewed in this study and, I argue, is a contributing factor to the tensions they experience in relation to assessment practices.

When discussing their understanding of the school's goal of "ensuring the gospel message is an integral part of all we do", the respondents noted how the Bible informs their ontological view of the student and, in turn, provides a theological foundation for approaches to learning and teaching. I identified three key points in relation to their view of the learner. The first of these was that "every student is created in the image of God" (Lisa, 107-108). For Renee this meant, "being image bearers of God, created in his image…that's my first awareness on interacting with students and colleagues and people I meet" (Renee, 13-17). Furthermore, being created in the image of God means that "God calls us to be the very best we can be" (Lisa, 119).

The second key point in relation to the view of the learner was that "every child is unique, uniquely formed and has a unique purpose" (Lyndell, 40-41). The school website recognises "that each individual has been endowed with natural talents and ability to develop strengths and skills across a range of endeavours so that they find life-long fulfilment in making a unique and positive contribution to society" (School website – Curriculum). In this context, the goal of Christian education, including assessment, is to "help each student to reach their optimal potential to develop and exercise their diverse abilities" in order to live a life of service to God and others (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 150). Dominic referenced a verse from

the Bible to emphasise the point. He said that Jesus grew in favour with God, in favour with the people and in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52) and that this encapsulated the goal of the school mission: "to ensure that each child is actually developing, not just in one area, not just academically, but as a whole person" (Dominic, 175-177).

The third undergirding view of the learner was that of discipleship. In line with the literature (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993; Van Brummelen, 2009), a number of teachers expressed the goal of Christian education being "to develop disciples" (Julie, 27) and the role of teachers to "really disciple and help those students to be the very best they can be" (Lisa, 121-122). Within a biblical framework, disciples of Christ take on his character (become Christlike) and commit themselves to Christ's vision and to applying it to their everyday lives in acts of service to God and others. Van Brummelen (2009) sums it up this way:

> First the students learn to unfold the basis, framework and implications of a Christian vision of life. Second, they learn about God's world and how humans have responded to God's mandate to take care of the earth. Third, they develop and responsibly apply the concepts, abilities, values and creative gifts that enable them to contribute positively to God's kingdom and society. (p. 14)

The ultimate goal of discipleship is Biblical human flourishing and, therefore, requires an all-inclusive view of student development. This view, which is reflected on the school website, also aligns with the literature on Christian education (Green, 2017; Hill, 1989; Rooney, 2009; Van Brummelen, 2009). Oasis Christian College is, effectively, in the business of faith habitus formation and the cultivation of spiritual resources with the goal being to develop students whose lives (and practices) reflect Christian ethos.

One final important element in relation to the view of the learner is the notion of the learner as part of a community. The school website describes Oasis as a 'community' and communicates the importance of relationships, partnerships with parents and serving the broader community. This is in line with Stronks and Blomberg's (1993) notion of a 'covenant community' where there is a deep commitment to serving one another. Further to this, Van Brummelen (2009) contends that a key hallmark of an effective Christian school is that it is a "community for learning" as opposed to "collections of individuals going about their own tasks" (p. 228). Interestingly though, neither the school website nor the respondents made much reference to the concept of students being part of a *learning* community or the particular relevance of this from a biblical perspective. Whilst the *Learning and Teaching Policy* does acknowledge the

importance of positive relationships for successful learning, there is no reference to learners 'learning in community' nor what this might look like. This led me to wonder whether those responsible for the official documentation as well as the teachers' own ways of thinking have been so 'conditioned' (Bourdieu, 1990a) or habituated through their engagement in the broader education system that they, without conscious reflection, accept the prevailing notion of education ultimately as an individual and competitive, rather than a social and collaborative, endeavour. This will be discussed further in Section 5.4.5.

5.2.2 Biblical Human Flourishing

The mission of Oasis Christian College is to "develop within each student the desire and ability to fulfil God's will in their lives" and to "develop Christian faith and character". Another way to articulate this is to simply say that the desire is for students to become like Christ, or 'Christlike'. This notion of what it means to be Christlike or 'truly human' (Hill, 1989; Rooney, 2009) is very much connected to the Christian schools' view of the learner and the goal for each learner to develop holistically, academically, spiritually, emotionally and physically. Oasis Christian College has sought to articulate an understanding of 'Christlikeness' though its *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes.*

This section outlines the development of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes*, which were conceived by the school as a way of encapsulating the school's distinctive Christian ethos into a framework that could then be used to guide and shape school curriculum content, learning and teaching practices, policies, programs and behaviours. This description of the process of creating the *Attributes* including the professional learning activities engaged in by staff, begins to reveal the teachers' perspectives regarding the relationship between ethos and College practices and provides a background to the 'prompts' which were used during the semi-structured interviews. This section also offers a context for the numerous references made by the teachers to the *Attributes* throughout their interviews (which are cited in this and the following chapter). This section also gives an insight into some of the professional learning activities which have been undertaken by the staff at Oasis Christian College and which may have influenced teachers' thinking about the types of professional learning activities that they believe might be valuable in supporting them as they navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices. It is important to note that as the researcher, I was an 'insider' in terms of the development of both the framework and the design of the associated professional learning activities. However, in an endeavour to avoid a myopic account in this section, my research diary along with notes, feedback, summaries and

artefacts produced during professional learning sessions are used (with staff written consent as per Appendix 4) to underpin the narrative.

During 2015, initial work was done to commence the development of this framework. In my role as Head of Learning and Teaching at the school, I was involved in this process. The Head of College sought feedback from staff in a number of forums, and discussions also took place at Executive Team level (Research diary, August 27, 2015 & September 17, 2015). The goal of the framework was to articulate the Christian ethos of the school in a way that also encompassed the core skills and attributes that students need to succeed in work, life and citizenship in the 21st century as outlined by the literature (Care et al., 2012; Khan, 2012; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; SRI International, 2012b; Treadwell, 2008). Discussions centred on what the school saw as the competencies, skills and attributes that it wants to instil and foster in its students through the curriculum content, teaching and learning practices, school programs, relationships and behaviours. Over time, and with input from staff, the framework was refined and eventually summarised in a graphic along with a description of each of the elements and links to key Scriptures (See Appendix 9).

In developing the 2016 professional learning plan, it was agreed by the College Executive team (of which I was a member) that the staff professional learning days at the commencement of the year would be used to formally introduce the framework. This occurred in three parts over three consecutive days. The first utilised a guest speaker from a Christian tertiary institute to provide input and stimulus around the Christian ontological understanding of what it means to be human and how views of what a person 'is' influence notions of ethics, epistemology, vocation and, ultimately, the purpose of Christian education. The second part comprised an introduction and initial unpacking of the actual framework. Part 1 and part 2 involved all school staff, both teaching and non-teaching. Part 3, for teaching staff only, saw the teachers working collaboratively in faculty teams taking one unit of work and associated assessment task and exploring how the assessment task might incorporate elements of the framework. The intention for the three sessions was to provoke thinking about Christian ethos, moving from the broader philosophy down to the very practical implications for assessment tasks at the classroom level.

On the first day, two sessions were run by the external speaker. The first session took the form of lecture style with PowerPoint presentation. The key questions addressed in the session were:

- What does it mean to be truly human?
- What does human flourishing look like?

The presenter explored various philosophical positions such as rationalism, romanticism and individualism before outlining a biblical understanding of what it means to be truly human, that is, to be Christlike.

In unpacking a biblical understanding of Christlikeness and what it means to be "made in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), the speaker challenged the Oasis staff with a number of key questions:

- How do your educational structures enable people to flourish as *embodied* image-bearers of God?
- How do you help students do their work for the glory of God and the flourishing of others?
- How might you nurture students' excellence and yet bend it towards servanthood?
- What to do with the surrounding culture?
  Stand against the culture?
  Be at one with the culture?
  Try and transform the culture?

In essence, the purpose of this session was to bring into focus the underpinning theological basis of the school's espoused Christian ethos and to flag, at a broad, but deeply philosophical level, the potential tensions between this and opposing cultural discourses which exist within society. The session concluded by encouraging participants to consider the role of the Christian school in presenting and fostering a biblical understanding of human flourishing and the challenges that may be inherent in this.

On the second day, the Head of College formally introduced the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes*. He did this by first linking to the sessions of the previous day and then outlining the purpose of the *Attributes*; namely to provide a framework which would serve to focus the development of Christlikeness across the school. He then provided a biblical based definition for each of the *Attributes*.

Staff were then asked to consider how, once embodied, the *Attributes* might look in students at the various levels as well as for staff members. This was done by placing a number of large cut-outs representing students and staff on boards around a room and asking staff to consider,

for example, what a confident Junior school student would look like, or what a courageous staff member would look like. Staff were provided with sticky notes and used these to post their ideas on the various boards, each representing one of the *Attributes*. The key purposes of this task were to engage staff in thinking about the *Attributes* and how they might be operationalised and to enable staff to begin to develop ownership of the framework. The task also generated a lot of feedback that was able to be used to further refine the definitions of the *Attributes* and the accompanying support documents. My observation was that staff engaged extremely enthusiastically in this task and there was considerable energy in the room as it was completed. A significant amount of feedback was gathered.

Day three of the professional learning saw teachers working collaboratively, in faculty and year level teams, to begin to consider how they might very practically, through assessment tasks, strengthen the development of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* in students. Faculty leaders were asked before the session to gather one assessment task along with the accompanying rubric and unit of work for the task. (Rubric development was also a current area of focus for the school and during 2015 teams commenced the task of developing a consistent approach to the construction and use of rubrics). The instructions for the workshop were for teams to look at one unit of work and an associated assessment task and discuss which of the *Learning Well Attributes* might be able to be strengthened through student engagement with the unit and how the assessment task might foster and measure student growth in the *Attributes*. They were then asked to work together to brainstorm further improvements to the current assessment task and/or some possible new assessment tasks which clearly foster the development of the relevant *Attributes*. An exemplar and template were provided to support this. Finally, if time allowed, teams were asked to attempt to develop a rubric for either the reviewed task or one of the new ones.

The process of the development of the *Flourishing at Oasis Framework* was designed around effective professional learning practices as identified in the literature: focused, collaborative, embedded and sustained over time. As an institution within the field of Christian education, a number of the distinct rules, assumptions and beliefs (Grenfell & James, 1998) were evident, particularly in the professional learning days. Each day commenced with worship, prayer and a devotional message all of which were accepted and expected as the ‘normal’ way to commence a professional learning day at Oasis Christian College. Inherent in these ‘rituals’ are “shared beliefs, attitudes and inclinations” (Ladwig, 1994, p. 347). These shared beliefs include an understanding of one’s role as being more than just a ‘job’ but a ministry and a

service to God. Hence the priority of commencing the day with activities which focus attention in this way. These activities or rituals, which would not be out of place in many church services, also highlight the fact that the institution overlaps the two fields of education and religion.

Through personal reflection on the process and looking through a Bourdieuian lens, it would appear that the professional learning sessions themselves also provide evidence of shared beliefs and unspoken assumptions. Whilst negotiation took place between myself as the Head of Learning & Teaching and the guest presenter regarding the content of his sessions, this was done with a high degree of unspoken understanding and assumption about the field and its participants. The presentation presumed a level of shared faith habitus among the school staff that would enable them to access and internalise the spiritual ideas and concepts being shared. My observation was that staff engaged very positively with the presentations and the following workshops and discussions produced a large volume of documented reflective comments and suggestions which were later collated.

Data collected over the three days provides evidence that there exists a shared acceptance of the core tenets of the Christian faith as espoused by the College and an understanding that faith and work, and faith and learning, ought not be compartmentalised, but rather integrated in meaningful ways in line with the College vision which states the goal of "ensuring the gospel message is an integral part of all we do" (Oasis Christian College Vision Statement). Comments such as "we need to live and breathe our faith every day" (Staff workshop notes, 'Sweating the small stuff', 2016) support this. Staff participation and responses demonstrated strong alignment with the notion that an integral part of their mandate as Christian educators is to individually and collectively influence culture. This was evidenced in many of the comments made by staff in workshops, some of which included:

> *The presentation affirmed our role as cultural influencers. We all shape the culture through the relationships we have with staff and students.*
> *The presentation made us realise that we need to embed our Christian influence into our curriculum.*
> *We create culture in even routine activities – through assemblies, awards, presentation nights.*
> *[The] subliminal things we do, the hidden curriculum…our daily behaviours, attitudes and choices impact the culture.* (Staff workshop feedback notes, 'Sweating the small stuff', Jan 21, 2016)

These quotes demonstrate the awareness teachers have that their behaviours, attitudes and choices (their habitus) impacts the culture of the school, shapes their practice and has potential influence on the students. Indeed, both the content of the presentations and the comments of the teachers themselves confirmed that influencing culture is a key goal of the institution. The feedback staff gave in relation to the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* was provided with much enthusiasm and included 130 suggestions for ways staff could and should embody the *Attributes* in order to be effective in their roles and also to ensure that they are authentic role-models for the students and parents of the school community.

However, these sessions also began to highlight some perceived tensions between the biblical notion of being 'truly human' and College practices. One of the workshop questions was: *What do students learn about being 'truly human' from the way Oasis structures school life?* This question was essentially asking teachers to reflect on the connection between the College's espoused ethos and worldview and some of the school structures. In the first session the speaker had outlined that to be truly human is to be Christlike. He further outlined what human flourishing might look like. This question was really asking: How do your educational structures enable people to flourish as embodied image-bearers of Christ?
What came through very strongly in responses to this question was a sense of disconnect between the view of human flourishing which was presented (and which most staff identified with) and the College's practices around assessment and awards. Whilst there was acknowledgment of the ways in which the school actively promotes the development of character and provides opportunity for service, nearly all groups noted that some College practices placed a disquieting level of value on a narrow type of academic achievement in a way that might be sending students and parents a contradictory message about what human flourishing actually looks like. Teacher comments included:

> *[We need to be] looking at children as a whole and not just academics*
> *The awards are an elitist system*
> *Do we acknowledge improvement enough? Are we teaching that God has made them for a purpose or is it still academic based?*
> *How do we educate parents to make them aware that we aren't just a school about academics but that we are here to educate the whole child?*
> *Your test score doesn't define who you are but our reports do not always convey how the student has grown into being truly human.* (Staff workshop feedback notes, 'Sweating the small stuff', Jan 21, 2016)

A concern was expressed about what the College is seen to value in its practices (high academic achievement) as opposed to what it claims to value (education of the whole child and students' growth towards being 'truly human'). There was concern over what was described as "subliminal" culture: "Students could well be confused as we don't present a clear idea of what human flourishing is to them" (Staff workshop feedback notes, 'Sweating the small stuff', Jan 21, 2016). The teachers who were interviewed for this study further expanded upon these types of comments and questions. Their responses are presented later in this chapter.

This section has described the process that led to the development of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes.* In doing so, it not only provides important background to the interviews, but also offers insight into the perspectives of the teachers beyond those who were interviewed. It is evident that the teachers at Oasis Christian College share a view that education in a Christian school is about much more than academic success. Their understanding of human flourishing takes into account a holistic view of the student that encompasses spiritual, physical, emotional and academic development.

5.2.3 Curriculum content and pedagogy

At Oasis Christian College, the curriculum is seen as a vehicle for developing Christian character in students and exposing them to a biblical worldview. The school website outlines a number of principles that underpin the design and delivery of curriculum. These include:

- Upholding a Christian worldview – a Christian worldview, based firmly on the Bible, incorporated into all aspects of teaching and learning
- Significance of wisdom and knowledge – "a rejection of a secular humanist view that regards humans as the sole source and constructors of knowledge" but rather a recognition of human endeavours and capacities being a reflection of God and what it means to be made in his image
- Realising potential – dedicated to all students achieving their full potential
- Commitment to lifelong learning – learning should be differentiated allowing students to "work at their own pace and in contexts of interest to them" (Oasis Christian College Website - *Curriculum*, 2016)

The Christian ethos as espoused by the school identifies the importance of the integration of faith and learning and the curriculum being based on a set of presuppositions that are derived from the organisation's Statement of Faith which, in turn, originates from the Bible.

When thinking about the school vision statement and the goal of integrating the gospel into all practices, all respondents made reference to the curriculum.

> *So thinking about the gospel message … the big story of God … you can't view anything outside of that so it doesn't … make sense to try and teach a subject not referencing that because all of the world is impacted by that… So I think it's trying to include God's story and the picture of where we fit in, into everything that we teach. I think it's easier in some things than other things, but, yeah, that's what I think it means.* (Chris, 9-27)

Sarah used the metaphor of "weaving" the gospel throughout the curriculum whilst others spoke about "integrating our belief system into what we are teaching" (Angela, 13-14) and "making connections" between the Bible and the curriculum (Helen, 20; Angela, 19; Julie, 127). Lisa and Dominic spoke about presenting an alternative view to the textbook and dominant media and Clare referred to demonstrating Christian themes and principles through the curriculum.

Although there was very little to be found in the school documentation regarding how Christian ethos might impact pedagogy, there was an understanding amongst some of the teachers that Christian ethos should not just be applied to *what* is taught but also *how*: "It [the curriculum] needs to be to be delivered in a way that reflects what my belief system is" (Angela, 86-887). I interpret these statements to mean that teachers understand Christian education should not just be about the application of Christian ethos and worldview in relation to content, but also to pedagogical practices.

It is worth noting here a personal reflection from the perspective of someone who has worked in the Christian education sector for 30 years. During this time, I have been regularly exposed to professional learning and literature that explores how Christian ethos and biblical worldview might be applied to the curriculum content in the Christian school context. In other words, significant attention has been given to *what* is taught and models for applying a Biblical lens to curriculum have been developed. However, with regard to the *how* of teaching, that is, the kinds of teaching and learning strategies that would align with ethos,

there has been much less focus. Van Brummelen's book *Walking with God in the Classroom* (Van Brummelen, 2009), first published in 1988, has been a key text for Christian school educators and Van Brummelen himself was a keynote speaker at many Australian and international Christian education conferences. Whilst this key text does include a chapter which looks at issues related to planning for 'meaningful learning' and doing so in such a way that is consistent with the Christian school view of the learner, my experience is that this is not something that has been addressed in Christian schools to the same degree that planning for curriculum content has been. As an insider, I therefore do not find it surprising that both the College documentation and the interviewed teachers had less to say in general about this (although the teachers were very articulate more specifically about assessment strategies when given the opportunity to reflect on these in relation to Christian ethos).

This causes me, as both Christian school educator and researcher, to raise the question of why this is the case. Why, in my experience in Christian schooling, has the *how* of learning and teaching received less focus? Is this another area where Christian schools have largely accepted the broader sphere of educational practices without question? (Hill, 1989; Justins, 2009). Are Christian schools and the individuals within them so habituated to the practices of the broader education field that they do not even think about them?

5.2.4 Embodiment of the gospel and religious practices

As outlined in Section 4.3.2, all staff of Oasis Christian College are expected to ascribe to and uphold the school's Statement of Faith. Furthermore, there is an expectation that each staff member will actively continue to develop their own faith habitus and that their Christian worldview would impact all aspects of their work, including their relationships with other community members.

For the respondents in this study, teacher embodiment of the gospel and personally reflecting Christ and Christlike behaviour was crucial. When asked what "integrating the gospel into all we do" meant for her, Helen responded by saying,

> *It's who you are. It's how you interact with parents, it's how you interact with students and show Christ-like grace and characteristics towards the students, towards the parents, towards colleagues. It's everything that you do.* (Helen, 39-44)

Incarnation of the gospel means a commitment by staff to approaching all that they do through a biblical lens. This includes demonstration of compassion, mercy, love, pastoral care

for others and the 'fruits of the spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23). Renee spoke about "exemplifying Christian values" and many teachers referred to the notion of being a "role-model" to students. The importance of godly relationships and of the need to be extremely mindful of how they cultivate these was considered highly important and integral to the school's capacity to fulfil its mission. I developed the sense that, for the teachers at Oasis Christian College, who you are as a Christian teacher and how you reflect Christ in your actions, is just as (if not more) significant than your words or your teaching practice.

Furthermore, a number of the teachers talked about their involvement in religious practices within the school and the way in which this also contributes to the articulation and integration of the Christian ethos. In particular, references were made to daily staff and student devotions, times of corporate worship, and the place of prayer. Lyndell's quote cited at the commencement of this section encapsulates the general comments around this (Lyndell, 13-32). In her study which described the nature and cultural impact of a Bible-based ethos upon students and staff at one Christian school in the United Kingdom, Green (2009) found that formal occasions where staff met together such as for staff briefings and assemblies acted as "key motifs for the formal presentation of the Bible-based ethos in college life" (Green, 2009, p. 263). Green identified that these kinds of school structures and practices are shaped by the assumptions shared by staff that she conceptualised as faith habitus.

Demonstration of an explicit faith habitus is a key criterion for recruitment at Oasis Christian College and is also an important influence on the ethos and culture of the school. Literature on Christian education suggests a shared religious worldview and the faith perspectives of the staff are crucial for the delivery of effective and authentic Christian education. Where the goal is to guide students to walk in God's ways, a teacher's personal faith commitment is seen as highly important (Van Brummelen, 2009). However, this faith habitus exists alongside another set of dispositions, beliefs and attitudes which are shared by the teachers and which have been developed through the internalisation of the structures of the educational world (Wacquant, 1989). As my analysis progressed, it became clear that, for the teachers, there are two embodied histories at play: one that emanates from their immersion in the education field and another which reflects their socialisation in the religious field. As the teachers reflected in the interviews as part of this study, it became clear that these influences can diverge, resulting in a source of tension which is difficult for teachers to resolve, particularly around the educational 'hot spot' of assessment.

5.2.5 Summary

Education at Oasis Christian College professes to be about a commitment to nurturing the spiritual growth, faith habitus and the God-given capacity of each child. This is well articulated in the official documentation of the College and it was evident that the values and beliefs associated with Christian ethos form part of the faith habitus of the teachers interviewed.

However, as Smith (2003) points out, a school's ethos is found within the interplay between the formal expression of its aims and vision as articulated in key documents, the values, attitudes and behaviours of the community members *and* the external processes that impact the school. This then gives rise to what Donnelly (2000) noted in his study, the potential for tension between the 'aspirational ethos' of school and the lived reality of ethos.

In the following section, I will outline and discuss how the teachers described perceived tensions between the school's espoused Christian ethos and what they experienced as actually occurring in the practices of the school, specifically in relation to assessment practices.

5.3 The Broader Field of Education

As the interview questions moved specifically to the topic of assessment in the Christian school context, the teachers spoke about what could be defined as impediments that prevent both the school, and them as individual teachers, from fully realising the school vision and ethos as articulated in school documentation. Many of the teachers described a feeling of being caught between two worlds. Chris captured this sentiment well when he said, "I think we're caught between two paradigms" (100-101). This resonates with the biblical calling for Christians to be 'in' the world but not 'of' it as outlined in the Bible in John 17:14-16 and Romans 12:2. These Bible passages describe the tension Christians might expect to experience as they live in and seek to navigate a world that often espouses and promotes ideologies, beliefs and practices that sit in conflict with biblical principles. One commentator described it thus: "The Spirit of God in true Christians is opposed to the spirit of the world" (Henry, 1997, p. 1011).

The teachers in this study recognised a struggle between, on the one hand, the vision and mission of the school and, on the other, the exertion of external economic power and pressure upon the school. I interpreted this struggle as contestation in relation to deep-rooted beliefs or what Bourdieu calls doxa: "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be

asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16). This contestation occurs in relation to the practices of the education field, over various forms of capital, with the expectations of the parents and within the teachers' own values and beliefs (habitus). Furthermore, it would appear that the underpinning philosophies and drivers of what the teachers described as 'the system' appear to be largely taken for granted rather than discussed and challenged. Examples of this in the interview data include Lisa (92) saying, "I haven't thought about that one" when asked about whether any school practices might be at odds with ethos; Helen's (358-359) comment, "I have not ever been in a position to question assessment, it's just been we have to do it"; or when Clare (44) said in the early part of her interview, "I don't think they [the goals of assessment] should be different to any other school's" but then totally contradicted this view later in her interview.

5.3.1 The 'System'

The respondents were most articulate about what they perceived as external pressures that many of them invariably referred to as 'the system'. Teachers defined this system as the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and its associated requirements, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), the requirement to deliver the Australian Curriculum and, more broadly, the prevailing and accepted school structures and conventions such as stages defined by age, high stakes testing, comparison and ranking. Teachers spoke of this external system as being "imposed", creating "restrictions" and being "unbiblical". Teachers described themselves and the school as "stuck", "locked in" and "bound" by a system that they feel is disconnected from the school's philosophy and ethos.

In particular, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) was described by many as driving the focus away from the school's espoused values and influencing the learning agenda of the school. The VCE is the certificate that students in Victoria can choose to work towards and receive on satisfactory completion of their secondary education. It involves a government mandated curriculum and high stakes testing. In describing VCE, Lyndell said, "It's the endpoint that drives what happens, it works backwards and I don't believe it should". Renee identified a "disconnect" at VCE because "it's an outside assessment system so definitely it's very hard to relate that back to our values, but I think even at other year levels there is a disconnect". I identified a sense that, up until the junior secondary years, there may be more opportunity and time to give more attention to the development of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* in students. However, Michael described students' pathway through to the senior years as a "funnel of capacity to focus on the *Attributes*" with VCE being the tip of the narrow

stem. At this apex, assessment tasks, exams, tertiary entrance scores and university pathways dominate focus, with the development of Christlikeness taking a back seat. Furthermore, in contrast to viewing the learner with unique God-given talents which were to be revealed and developed, respondents felt that the system "made everyone the same" (Chris, 141) and "treated students as a number" (Lisa, 263).

I claim that, for the teachers, these perspectives sat in tension with the notion of each child being uniquely made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) as well as the school's espoused goal to avoid "the squeezing of students into a specific mould" (Oasis Christian College Constitution, 2013, p. 6). However, Bourdieu would argue that the system is, in fact, intentionally set up to reproduce the social order and to ensure that each child is sorted and sifted into their correct place in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), making it difficult for a school such as Oasis to achieve an opposing goal.

Most of the teachers articulated this dichotomous struggle between the school's ethos and the underpinning philosophy of 'the system' as one that they are unable to resolve. Lyndell felt that, if the staff chose to "work the way we want and with what we believe", the result would be "well rounded" students – but that these students may not pass their VCE" (Lyndell, 159-162). Similarly, Lisa said; "at the end of the day we have to prepare students for what they're going to be assessed on and I think we would be doing an absolute disservice if we changed that. We have to work within the system" (Lisa, 390-393).

Again, I conceptualized these teacher perspectives broadly in terms of a tension that teachers experience between the Christian school and the wider field of education. In Bourdieuian terms, between the privileging of different forms of capital. The teachers are describing the "institutionalized mechanisms…which tend to fix the value accorded to different products, to allocate these products differentially and to inculcate belief in their value" (Bourdieu, 1991b, p. 24). The education field promotes, and is designed to reproduce, certain types of cultural and linguistic capital. Furthermore, the prevailing assessment practices tend to privilege these to the disadvantage of other forms of cultural capital including those inherent in the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes*.

5.3.2 Economic pressure

Respondents noted that the school needs funding in order to "survive" therefore making it obligated to the suppliers of that funding: the parents and the government. This was

powerfully expressed in John's interview. John was very conscious of the need to meet the expectations of those who fund the school. However, for him there was a sense that these expectations of key stakeholders are often at odds with the school mission statement ("the gospel message is an integral part of all we do"). This quote, cited earlier as an example of how thematic coding helped to highlight key issues and now further expanded here, is evidence of how John articulated this conflict:

John: *However, there are problems even then and this is where I get conflicted a bit, is … I was thinking about this, especially when we're talking about assessment and reporting. Also I wonder what … what are we getting paid, or who is giving us money and what are they expecting from us as well? Because I think that's where we run into one conflict.*

Interviewer: *Well, who is giving us money?*

John: *Well the parents are giving us money but are they looking at it that that's what they're expecting? I know that's our mission statement but is that what they're expecting when they give us the money? And to me, that already creates a problem because I think in most cases, no it's not; they're giving us the money for education. And that already … makes things difficult because you actually then get a parent body that is really pushing you in a certain direction. And so how do you … how do you work with that? Because I don't hear too many parents come to me and say, "Look, my little Johnny is just not Christ-like enough and what are you going to do about it?" But I will hear, if the Science results aren't what they should be, those sorts of things. So we've got a certain thing that's driving, and that's where our focus gets put on, and … in a way, rightly so because that's what's being asked of us. But does that mean that we can actually meet that mission statement? It sort of drags us away from that mission statement in some instances.* (John, 50-82)

For John, this theme of meeting the expectation of those that pay then extended beyond parents to the other key provider of funding: the government. When prompted to further expand on this notion of 'who pays us', he responded:

> *Well, I didn't even get into this; the other part of course is the Australian Curriculum. So, when you look at it in terms of how much money do we get and where do we get it from and what they're expecting for that money, the government is not giving us money because we're Christian and for that mission statement, the government's giving us money to meet the Australian Curriculum; that's what it's tied to. And I don't know, there's probably other regulations to what it's tied to as well; but that's one of them.* (John, 121-139)

It appears uppermost in John's mind that the provision of funds renders the school accountable, even beholden, both to parents and governments. He feels that as parents and governments provide money, this privileges their expectations. This is a problem because, as John experiences it, there is a perceived disconnect between these external expectations and the school mission.

I interpreted John's remarks as identifying different forms of capital at play in the field. For example, parents can exchange economic capital in the form of school fees for 'results' and consequent symbolic capital in the form of a Victorian Certificate of Education, which can then be transacted for university entrance. Governments are dealing with economic capital whilst, at the same time, the school is also trying to cultivate a particular form of cultural capital as well as spiritual resources. Furthermore, John seems to be experiencing tension in reconciling the value of these different forms of capital and resources. Within the field of education, a school leaving certificate is of high value. However, within this Christian school there is also an espoused value on Christian ethos that leads to the development of a faith habitus. For John, there appears to be a tension around what exactly should be privileged and whether or not the school's current practices live up to the school's aspirations.

5.3.3 Parent expectations

In describing the struggles they associate with applying the school's mission and ethos to assessment practices, the majority of interviewed teachers spoke about a tension between the school's Christian ethos and articulated goals, and what they observed when it came to expectations of parents.

> *I think parents are always focused on academic results, to be honest.* (Clare, 130)

Some teachers felt that parent expectations and priorities were not totally in line with the school's professed values and ethos. I identified a perspective among the participants that

parents were seen to value academic outcomes and 'results' above all else. It was felt that parents drive comparison (Chris, 79) and place a high value on grades and marks in a way that makes it difficult for the school to privilege or focus on other elements, such as the elements of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes*. This narrowing of parent focus was seen to increase as students moved through the school.

> *Here in Junior school…the wellbeing [of students]…plays an important role but somehow the focus for the parents, and probably the kids, becomes academic performance, and that overrides everything else.* (Dominic, 341-432)

Comments such as this suggest that parents are also habituated into the privileging of high stakes testing and the kind of cultural capital that can be exchanged ultimately for economic capital.

As articulated by John in the previous section, the teachers reported to me that their perspective on what parents understand and articulate about the value of different forms of capital, is also a source of tension. Bourdieu argued that education, as a form of symbolic capital, is just one of many strategies used by families to preserve and improve their social position (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 273). Whilst parents may value the Christian ethos of Oasis Christian College, for many the kind of capital that comes from academic success may be the ultimate priority. This raises the question of whether (and how) the school can really fulfil its mission if it is not fully known and embraced by parents or if parents have priorities which compete with the school's espoused goals.

In speaking about the expectations of parents, some of the interviewed teachers recognised that the school had made efforts to attain a greater balance in what is reported to parents in terms of student progress. This had been done by including not just academic outcomes but also the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes*. However, the participants acknowledged that the valuing of this could require a significant shift in thinking on the part of parents:

> *I guess we would have to look at parent education because…I think it needs a fairly radical shift to say we value these things in your kid's life as much as we value their academic things… And I don't think that's a small shift, like I think parents would find that really unique and really strange, so that's probably an obstacle.* (Chris, 353-364)

The teachers' perspectives are significant because what parents value in the education of their children matters a great deal for Oasis Christian College as it seeks to develop a faith habitus

in its students and orient them towards the fulfilment of developing and using their God-given gifts in service to the community. Parents and families play a significant role in the formation of a child's values and dispositions. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) describe this process of habitus formation as 'pedagogic work' and identify that the family is where this primary pedagogic work takes place. Furthermore, "this learning, this process of inculcation, is effectively irreversible…[and] cumulative: the habitus acquired during family education is the basis for the receipt of the classroom message, which in turn is the basis for the response to all subsequent cultural and intellectual messages" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 107). This would indicate that, if the secondary pedagogic work of the school is to lead to the fulfilment of the school's goals to develop faith habitus and inculcate a Christian ethos, that there needs to be strong alignment between home and school. This correlates with the Christian education literature in which the importance of partnership with parents is a well-articulated underpinning value. Edlin (1999) states that "Christian schools should not be mere recipients of children where the school is viewed as a separate world from the family…In fact, the Christian school is partly the extension of the home" (p.92). Similarly, within its documentation, Oasis Christian College articulates its mission "to partner with parents and the wider community to help develop within each student the desire and capacity to discover and fulfil the will of God for their lives" (Oasis Christian College Website - *Guiding Principles*).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggest that secondary pedagogic work can bring about a "radical conversion" by "killing off the 'old man' and engendering the new habitus ex nihilo" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 44) but the examples of the kinds of institutions in which this might occur such as convents, prisons, asylums and boarding schools are somewhat extreme. Effectively, "the efficiency of secondary pedagogic work is determined by the level of similarity between the habitus it is seeking to produce and the pre-existing primary habitus" (Rowlands & Gale, 2017, p. 10), further supporting the importance of strong alignment of vision between home and school.

In this respect, the literature gives further weight to some of the interview respondents' concerns about the school's enrolment policy. Although clearly committed to the provision of a Christian education, the school has an open enrolment policy. This means that not all students and their parents share a commitment to the Christian faith. All families are interviewed as part of the enrolment process and only those who are identified as supportive of the ethos of the school are enrolled, but there are many non-believers and families of other faiths among these. The School Board and the staff see this as an important part of the

school's mission: to bring the gospel message to all who are open to receive it. However, as was recognised by John, this also creates a tension.

> *There are a lot [of parents] that somehow expect the Christian school to sort their child out but don't talk about being Christian to them. And you can see that in terms of where parents query it [Christian Studies] as a Year 12 subject. And you see that with the students in Year 12 towards the, you watch, towards the end of Term 3, have a look at the truancy we'll get in Christian Studies towards the end. And I think that's a direct correlation to whether the parents are valuing it. Well, if the students aren't valuing it, it comes from somewhere I think. I'm not saying that parents are totally at fault but I think sometimes there's an enabling that's going on.* (John, 911-930)

In this passage and others, John expressed a concern that many parents are not really committed to the ethos of the school because they do not share the same faith habitus. Whilst Bourdieu might see this tension as irreconcilable, the school may well argue that there is a force more powerful than the habitus and the practices that emanate from it – the transforming power of God. Indeed, Bourdieu's notion of 'killing off the old man' has a parallel in Scripture:

> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Christians believe in the power of God to transform the hearts and minds of men. Wilhoit (1996) advocates for a 'transformational approach' to Christian education which "seeks to foster a radical change in learner-disciples by remaking them from the inside out through the working of God's grace" (Wilhoit, 1996, p. 97). Oasis Christian College expresses this as a desire "that young people are transformed and can be a transforming influence through an education that is based on knowledge of the truth – a Christian worldview about God, themselves, creation, and human society" (Oasis Christian College Website – *Guiding Principles*). From this perspective, the staff at Oasis Christian College believe it is possible for Christian education to shape the hearts and minds of its students, regardless of their background. However, can this commitment extend to the parents and, if so, what sort of intentional action on the part of the school would be required? Edlin (1999) cautions that "where the visions of the school and home are in conflict, then there exists the possibility that the school's vision will lose its integrity as it becomes changed to conform to the parents or

vice versa" (Edlin, 1999, p. 92). The data in this study indicate that maintaining the integrity of the school's vision before the parent community may require greater intentional consideration and that the school should be proactive about ensuring that the parents are committed to the school vision. This might require more attention to communication and more strategic parent education programs (especially at the point of enrolment), along with prayer that invokes the transforming power of God.

5.3.4 The teachers' habitus

As outlined previously, all of the participants in this research identified that the teachers, with their faith habitus and commitment to Biblical principles, are key to the fulfilment of the school vision. This implies that teachers themselves could also obstruct the fulfilment of the school vision. Respondents spoke about this in two ways.

First, some respondents felt that the goal for staff to 'embody' the gospel, whilst fundamental, was not necessarily being achieved. Although teachers having "their own personal walk" (Michael, 30) of faith and a "growing relationship with God" (Julie, 18) was seen as vital, not all respondents were confident of this being the reality for all staff. Clare felt that what a teacher believed in would naturally come out in their interactions, emphasising for Clare the importance of the teacher's beliefs being aligned with school ethos. Lisa noted that sometimes teachers are "saying one thing but then we're doing another" (Lisa, 307) also highlighting the importance of the teachers' actions aligning with their words. However, Sarah felt there were a number of staff who are "not actually living it" (Sarah, 211). She felt that these staff might be appearing to "tick the boxes" (Sarah, 210) in relation to adherence to the Christian faith but questioned the strength of their personal faith commitment. In her eyes, this made it very difficult for them to be an authentic role model for the students.

The teachers' comments indicate a perspective that some of their colleagues do not have a strong or developed faith habitus. Whilst all staff at Oasis Christian College are required (at appointment) to articulate and demonstrate that they are active and committed Christians, the strategies employed to monitor this do not capture changes in a staff member's practices and beliefs over the time of their employment. Furthermore, a staff member's faith habitus is subject to a myriad of influences external to the school.

The other potential tension I identified in relation to teacher habitus came from what the teachers described as "mindset' or "habits". Teachers in the study identified that their own

natural inclinations (what Bourdieu would call habitus) often caused them to accept rather than challenge the status quo and that, when prompted to reflect on this during the interview, this was a realisation that sat uncomfortably with them. Helen reflected, "Well I guess I've just accepted it that it's the educational system that we are locked into, so … not that I'm being compliant about it…but in not acting on doing anything, I guess I am…" (Helen, 323-325).

Bourdieu would contend that, as people who have successfully navigated 'the system' of school and university as students and then spent their working life in the same system, the teachers are habituated to its conventions. He would argue that the practices and means of production of the education field are so ingrained within them that, for the most part, it is not part of the teachers' conscious thought. Teachers have internalised the structures of the educational world and "like a fish in water" are unable to feel the water (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 235). This is borne out in this research by the way that several respondents indicated it was the interview process itself that prompted deeper reflection. An example of this was when Lisa said, "I hadn't really thought about it" (214) or when respondents changed their views mid-interview with comments such as "now that I think about it…"

In addition, I argue that teachers possess and value the kind of cultural capital that is generated and exchanged within the education system and their default position is to privilege this. At one point during his interview, Chris clearly reflected this claim when he said,

> *I don't know, I guess because I've … it's the world I've been brought up in I suppose, yeah, it's just the values that have been imposed on me and you know I've done those things and part of it is probably, you know, I did pretty well in education obviously and so I want that to mean something, you know.* (Chris, 131-135)

For Bourdieu, a key feature of institutionalised education systems is their role in reproducing the conditions of their own existence. In *Reproduction in Education and Society*, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explained it thus:

> Every institutionalised education system (ES) owes the specific characteristics of its structure and functioning to the fact that, by the means proper to the institution, it has to produce and reproduce the instructional conditions whose existence and persistence (self-reproduction of the system) are necessary both to the exercise of its essential

> function of inculcation and to the fulfilment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary…. (p. 54)

In Bourdieuian language, Chris is saying that the education system has legitimated his habitus and its arising practices and enabled him to accumulate the cultural capital that has, in turn, positioned him advantageously and favourably in the field. His comments align with Bourdieu's notion that there is "a reciprocal relationship of mutual reinforcement between structural processes of institutionalisation and the professional interests of those who monopolise pedagogic work (teachers)" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 109). Furthermore, teachers, through their pedagogic action, reinforce their own value by reproducing the system that conferred value on them.

Chris went on to reflect that integrating the gospel more effectively into practices would require teachers to "change our background, our ingrained views around 'this is how we do assessment'" (Chris, 279-280). This again raises the question of how a habitus is formed, whether or not it can be reshaped, and the role of professional learning in doing so (the question I take up in Chapter 6). Invoking the 'mindsets' work of Dweck (2008), Lyndell described acceptance of the system and status quo as an issue of "fixed mindset" on the part of teachers and was confident that, with intentional effort, it could be overcome.

> *I think mindsets that are fixed, that go, "Oh, well this is the way it has to be" but I would question that…I would go, "Well that's a fixed mindset, we just haven't thought of it [a solution] yet, or we've not delved into that".* (Lyndell, 196-214)

5.3.5 Summary

The preceding section has outlined how the teachers described a perceived lack of congruence between the espoused vision of Oasis Christian College and the beliefs and practices of the broader field of education. I interpret the teacher's comments as evidence of attempts to move between two fields and their respective goals, ideologies and expectations. Their comments support the claim that "each individual occupies many fields and must constantly work to find a balance between the competing interests of the various fields" (Field, 2012, p. 62). The following section will focus more specifically, on how these tensions and competing interests were described in relation to assessment practices.

5.4 Assessment as a Site of Contestation

This study sought to understand how teachers in one Christian school describe the relationship between the espoused ethos of their school and the school's assessment practices. I contend that the teachers conceptualised this relationship as one of tension in terms of misaligned and conflicting school expectations, the compartmentalising of Christian ethos and a confusion around which field to privilege. Furthermore, the teachers described the challenge not just as a personal or individual one, but one that the school as an institution appeared to struggle with.

I surmised from the interviews that some of the teachers had already reflected on these tensions, but that, for many, the interview process was perhaps the first time that they had opportunity or inclination to actually articulate them. When asked about the goals of assessment in the Christian school context, the initial response of some participants indicated that they had never consciously considered the idea of linking a Christian school's ethos and its assessment practices. This was reflected in Clare's response, "I don't think they [the goals of assessment] should be different to any other school's [goals]" (Clare, 45-46) and also Lisa's, "[Assessment] in a Christian school context? That's probably something I don't really look at" (Lisa, 152-3). However, as the interviews progressed, both of these teachers were able to identify and articulate a number of tensions, suggesting that the interview itself served as a reflective tool. I interpret this as underscoring the importance of teachers having time to reflect on their beliefs, as well as time to explore inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices, as a precursor to change (Dixon et al., 2011).

5.4.1 Mixed messages

The analysis of data collected in this study revealed tensions in relation to the school, the school leaders and the teachers sending mixed messages regarding Christian ethos and what is valued in relation to assessment. Essentially this could be conceptualised as the notion of 'saying one thing but doing another'.

Rebecca held a view that assessment practices at Oasis Christian College are "not much different to what you would do in a secular school" (Rebecca, 37-38). She expanded on this when she said:

> *Rebecca:* *Well you could take any of our assessments and put it in a government school and they wouldn't have any issues with it, that's what I mean.*

Interviewer: *So how do you feel about that?*

Rebecca: *Thinking about it now, I think it's a shame. I think we should be doing … like there should be a difference.*

Interviewer: *So what should the difference be do you think?*

Rebecca: *I think it would be nice if we gave students the opportunity to explore how they feel about Christianity and how they feel about the gospel and these ethics and things like that, because we think we're teaching them a certain set of skills, we think we're teaching them a … certain character, you know, traits, and how to behave, and how to be a good citizen, and all of these stem from the gospel, they stem from the Bible and what we believe as Christians. But we actually don't know how much of that they've taken on board because we don't assess it.* (Rebecca, 104-112)

Angela and Chris further highlighted this perspective of Oasis Christian College's approach to assessment not being any different from other schools, despite its articulation of a distinctive purpose:

> *Well I feel we need to have a point of difference and if this is the way that everybody everywhere assesses then what's our point of difference, and because we're a Christian school it should be a point of difference. And if we're saying that we're now planning with that [Christian ethos] in mind, and pedagogically we're trying to embed that, then the next step surely is how we assess it.* (Angela, 153-158)

> *There's really, I don't think, a great deal of difference between what or how I assess compared to how someone in a non-Christian school without that ethos would assess.* (Chris, 53-55)

These comments align with the contentions of Hill (1989) and Justins (2009) that Christian schools have no distinctive practices when it comes to assessment and, in this area, are identical to secular schools. They also align with Hull (2003, p. 203) who argues, "Christian school educators typically settle for a smaller vision of Christian education than the one they aim for" and Murison (2018, p. 7) who suggests that unless *all* of education is shaped by a biblical worldview then the school is merely "providing a Christian adaptation of a secular school". I interpreted the teachers' reflections as indicating both the school's and the teachers'

habituated acceptance of the dominating 'rules' of the educational field in relation to assessment. Bourdieu would take this a step further and say that the school is not just accepting "an imposition of cultural arbitrary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5) through its assessment practices, but exists to fulfil the function of reproducing it. In contrast, however, the Christian education literature is clear that the goal of Christian schooling is to help each student fulfil their God-given gifts in order to fulfil their potential (Hill, 1989; Rooney, 2009). At Oasis Christian College, this is expressed as 'human flourishing' or Christlikeness. My analysis of the data for this study suggest, however, that whilst the school advances a particular narrative around its goals for students and what success might look like, it is not necessarily requiring or supporting its teachers to apply this in their assessment practices. I base this claim on statements made by a number of respondents, including Rebecca:

Interviewer: *Why do you think people are stumped for ideas [about how to align Christian ethos and assessment practices]?*

Rebecca: *Because it [aligning ethos into assessment practices] hasn't been necessarily forced, it hasn't been required, and when you get busy, generally you do what's required of you.*

Interviewer: *So what do you think is required? What do you identify as the requirements currently?*

Rebecca: *Being able to accurately assess whether your students have understood what's been taught and are able to demonstrate that understanding and application.*

Interviewer: *And what are the requirements around what's taught?*

Rebecca: *Incorporating the gospel. Is this a trick question?*

Interviewer: *No, no, it's not a trick question. I'm just asking you what is your perspective of what currently are the requirements around what you teach.*

Rebecca: *Well when you teach at a VCE level, my goal is to make sure that I'm ticking off the list of things that are on the study design. I have to make sure that each of those things are covered. And unfortunately in terms of, you know, schooling, in that regard on the study design there isn't anything about God on there so it's more the College that puts that requirement on us, not the state.*

Interviewer: *Yes. But is the College putting that requirement on you?*

Rebecca: *No.* (Rebecca, 261-283)

Rebecca went on to say that, whilst some people who are passionate about incorporating biblical perspectives into their classes might do so, those who feel less equipped or less inclined might just "do the bare minimum because it is not checked" (Rebecca, 292-293). Similarly, Renee felt that the school leadership measured her value or success as a teacher by her students' scores:

> *I get a statement of my students' results every year and various people in leadership can question me on why the student did or didn't do well. And so in some ways I am held to account for my students' score. But I may be interested in more than just their score but more about them and how they've developed throughout Year 12 as a person. But it still comes down to how well your students did on the exam to define my teaching.* (Renee, 146-152)

A number of respondents felt that students, particularly at the senior years, were also receiving inconsistent messages regarding what is most valued at Oasis Christian College. There was a concern that, ultimately, students are measured against whatever is dictated by ACARA or VCAA and not according to the school's biblically-based views on 'success' or flourishing.

Interviewer: *Do you think that there are any ways in which current assessment and reporting practices may even be at odds with that Christian ethos?*

Lisa: *I mean, only to the extent that we are … but it's one of those things I don't know that you can actually do anything about because, like, particularly with VCE we are assessing on, on outcomes and key knowledge and skills but at the same time basically what we're saying with that is, "That all you are is a number." And even when we tell them they're not, like I've gotten up in assembly I don't know how many times and, "You're not your ATAR, you're not your study score," so we say all that sort of stuff but then I think, just with the way we're driving them, "You've got to really try hard and get the best that you can do," I don't know; I think that does kind of then put their value in how well they do academically, when it shouldn't. Value should actually be in the fact that they're a child of God and not all of them are going to be great academically but that doesn't mean they're not all great because God can do all sorts of things and use different sets of skills; like, that's one*

> *area I'd say that we don't do well, but I don't know how you would change that given the framework that we have to work within…*
>
> *We do tell them over and over again, you know, "Don't be defined by this, your value is not in how well you do in a task or in a subject", but I don't know; because the behaviour, - and I guess that's the thing, - we're saying one thing but then we're doing another thing. And I think that's what they pick up on is what we're doing, "Okay, well you say I'm not my study score or my ATAR or my grade on this subject but you, at the end of the day you are giving me a grade and you are assessing me on these things."* (Lisa 259-278, 303-312)

These comments support Sadler's (1996, p. 53) suggestion that, despite being incompatible with Christian ethos, the prevailing ethics of competition and success are "deeply ingrained" in the Christian school culture. I understood the teachers in the study to be articulating the tension inherent in trying to embrace a competitive assessment environment whilst, at the same time, maintain the integrity of Christian ethos. Justins (2009) argues that this invariably results in compromise of the school's espoused values. The data also suggests that the mixed messaging has a domino effect: the institution and its leaders send mixed messages to staff who in turn pass on mixed messages to students.

This dichotomy is also present within the school documentation. On the one hand, there is a very strong articulation of the importance of values, Christian ethos, community, the integration of faith and learning and each child achieving their potential and developing their God-given gifts. However, this is juxtaposed with a Student Achievement website page that is essentially focused on academic results. There is no mention on this page of students achieving potential or achieving growth nor celebration of anything other than academic results. This page highlights the ATARs (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank), VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) study scores and tertiary pathways for the most recent graduating cohort as well as the school NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy) results. The Student Achievement page appears to place value solely on academic achievement as measured through high stakes testing, which certainly seems to contradict the goal of developing "well rounded young men and women" who achieve "excellent outcomes in all areas of education, including but not limited to, the academic sphere" (Oasis Christian College Website - *Executive Principal Welcome*). Furthermore, this

focus on a form of individual achievement which pits students in competition with each other could be seen as conflicting with the school's well-articulated commitment to the building of community and the biblical notion of the 'body of Christ' as outlined in the *Statement of Faith*. Whilst faith formation and character development are listed as high priority goals for the school, there is no mention or celebration of students who might 'achieve' in this area or be seen to embody the school values, either on the school website or in the annual *Community Report*.

5.4.2 Achievement and results versus holistic growth

I assert that a key tension for the teachers at Oasis Christian College exists around what assessment is actually *for* and, flowing on from that, the 'what' and 'how' of assessment. Contemporary scholars in the school assessment field general agree that the purpose of assessment should be to improve learning (Black & Wiliam, 2014; Fleer, 2015; Wyatt-Smith & Gunn, 2009). This view sits well alongside the Christian school goals of formation and discipleship (Hill, 1989; Maple, 2014). However, as outlined in Chapter 1, a key criticism of the prevailing regime of high stakes testing is that it has very little to do with learning (Timmis et al., 2016).

In this study the teachers spoke with some frustration about the challenge of trying to coalesce two seemingly competing goals and philosophies of assessment. Julie expressed the goal of assessment as, "to measure students' growth but, in a Christian school, we should not just measure a student's growth but help them develop further" (Julie 54-56). However, this goal was seen by many respondents to be at odds with what they experienced as a pressure to measure students' academic achievement against state based standards. Chris expressed this struggle to marry two seemingly competing purposes and underlying assumptions of assessment as a very personal one:

> *I struggle with this enormously, I think we're caught between two paradigms if you like, because I think on one hand … I struggle with this, am I trying to assess you against a standard, so am I trying to say this is what you should be able to do in Year Nine, here's what you can do, you know, so you're below this, you're above that. Or am I assessing you to inform you and tell you what you can do so that we can now go ok, so you can do this and this but we need to work on this and this, and sort of not as interested in the standard, I guess, in a sense, because that would change how I tested people.* (Chris, 100-110)

Chris is recognising and struggling with the different (and often competing) purposes of assessment. Chris's comment echoes the tension, highlighted in the literature, between assessment that serves to meet accountability, political and economic ends and assessment which is designed to improve learning and benefit the student (Fleer, 2015; Wyatt-Smith & Gunn, 2009). Lyndell clearly reflected a Bible-based view of assessment as a process that provides students and teachers with the feedback required in order facilitate the growth and development of students towards their God-given potential and becoming "truly human" (Rooney, 2009, p. 13) when she said:

> *In terms of a Christian perspective, it comes back to every child is unique, uniquely formed and has a unique purpose. And so, rather than just, "How are we going to get them through this curriculum, how are we going to get them from A to B and pass and move on to the next thing?" it's, "What are they needing to be able to grow as a person and develop who they are?"* (Lyndell, 40-46)

However, the majority of teachers felt that, in the end, grades, VCE results and the ultimate prize of a high ATAR are what really drive the school assessment agenda at Oasis Christian College. In addition, some teachers felt that a strong focus on VCE results ran counter to the school mission and ethos and to the desire for students to "increase in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52). This is a key tension that underpins analysis of the first research question. Lyndell said, for example:

> *But as they go through the school I think everything is centered on being able to enter into VCE and get out of VCE and get into university. Everything becomes much more result-driven and so I think that the time capacity, the focus is … it kind of pencil points down to that and so … what I see, is some of these … personal learning development actually has to, there is no time for it all, there's not a huge intention around it.* (Lyndell, 140-147)

In considering the reason for this, Angela posited:

> *We need to survive as a school, so, you know, results are public aren't they, so, we're measured by that when potential parents are looking at where they're going to send their kids to school, so we need a clientele so that's pretty important.* (Angela, 285-288)

Angela's comments again highlight that the tensions are not just at the teacher level but with the institution and the parents as well.

In his study investigating what school leaders perceived to be the essential features of Christian Education National member schools and how they embed these into school culture, Prior (2017) raised the question of how a school can ensure that the expectations of parents who do not necessarily hold the same worldview as the College do not become the key drivers. Prior's question was also relevant in this study as evident, for example, in the comment by John (quoted earlier in Section 5.3.3 above) where he questions whether parents are valuing Christian Studies, particularly at Year 12. In addition, this study extended or provided a focal point for Prior's question, via the perspective that Oasis Christian College parents are more focussed on academic results than they are on a holistic notion of development.

Though he did not necessarily agree with the practice, Michael saw the privileging of high achievement and 'winners' over improvement, or achieving a personal best, as "how life works", indicating an unquestioned acceptance of the status quo (Hill, 1989) that is nevertheless at odds with a Christian ethos which values the dignity of all people. Sarah interpreted the cause of this problem as "societal pressure":

> *Sarah:* *Well the scaling system would be the start, so to be fully creative doesn't get recognised as much as to be fully mathematical. In society we don't value it as highly with an ATAR score, a scaled score, and with an entrance result. You know, no one's asking for a 97 to get into painting.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *So it's societal pressure?*
>
> *Sarah:* *Yeah, it's societal pressure. We all do value academics above most other things. We do. We say that we understand the arts is important, or physical movement, or… but we do all still value academics.* (Sarah, 334-352)

Instead of the school being one that supports the biblical flourishing of each student, respondents felt the school had become beholden to an assessment philosophy that focuses on a narrow band of academic outcomes, and on ranked achievement rather than growth. The participating teachers recognised that an underlying purpose of assessment that serves the economic field of contemporary work is the sorting and sifting of students, potentially resulting in the "pigeonholing" (Angela, 222) of students, students being "defined by their grades" (Michael, 200; Rebecca, 175; John, 400), and students being pitted against one another in competition. Teachers, particularly those I interviewed who were working in the

senior levels of schooling, argued that this focus on results also tended to lead to teachers giving more attention to students who they perceived as having the potential to succeed within the system.

Bourdieu would argue that this is an example of the school teaching students the 'natural order' (of social hierarchy and domination), and of the school "reproducing the conditions of its own existence" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 109). The pedagogic action of the teachers results in active but inequitable distribution of capital, favouring some students over others. The school (and the broader education system) acts as a gatekeeper for the distribution of social and cultural capital. This results in the maintenance of the social power and distinction of society's dominant groups (Connell, 1993). This runs counter to the Oasis Christian College goal of "all students having equitable access to learning" (Oasis Christian College Constitution, 2013, p. 6) and the biblical principle of the 'body of Christ' with each member of the body having equal value and deserving of equal honour (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

One junior secondary teacher also suspected that there was greater focus in the senior years on "students who were going to do well" (Angela, 229). The risk inherent in such a practice is that students become defined according to their level of achievement in limited domains, which have largely been determined by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Australian Curriculum. Many of the participants felt this sat in opposition to students being defined according to a biblical ontology, as espoused by the school. Teachers were troubled by this and yet felt at a loss as to how to redress the balance.

> *I guess it's one of those things that I've just, like I struggle with it but at the same time I don't have any alternative solutions, do you know what I mean? At the end of the day, schooling is, shouldn't be, but it is about, you know, at the end of the day, putting students in a rank order so that they can go to university and get, you know; and it's, yes, I don't agree with it but it's the system that we are just stuck with, I guess.* (Lisa, 317-324)

Both Chris and John expressed frustration with assessment practices that require information to be summarised and reduced to a form of data that is not able to reflect a student's learning and development across a range of domains. The teachers felt that assessment should serve the purposes of "informing" (Michael, 99; Chris, 107; Lyndell, 50) and "moving forward" (Lyndell, 319; John, 226) and that the provision of feedback was a key part of this. It was felt that, in order to be of most use, assessment ought to be formative in nature, not just in

providing feedback to students and parents, but also informing teacher practice. Lyndell spoke about assessment "generating the next stage of the learning cycle" (Lyndell, 48) and of "informing the teacher of where the student needs to go next" (Lyndell, 50-51). Lisa spoke about assessment being a mechanism for reflecting on her own practice and facilitating improvement to ensure that she is catering for all of the learners in her classes (Lisa, 188-190).

The teachers in this study appeared to reflect what Broadfoot and Black (2004) recognised as tensions between the different purposes and forms of assessment. In this case, the tension is between formative assessment as a strategy to foster student growth towards biblical human flourishing and inform teacher practice and the type of summative assessment which is characterised by "the reification of learning outcomes, the extreme rationalism of codes for quality which attempt to rank and compare on the basis of reductionist measures…[and] the use of assessment data to name, to compare and to judge" (Broadfoot & Black, 2004, p. 19). The teachers appeared unable to move outside of an assessment regime that has become accepted as second nature not just by them, but also by the school and the parents. The teachers' comments also indicate that they struggled with the manner in which their practices (and the requirements of the broader system) resulted in the inequitable distribution of capital to students. They felt that they are not only beholden to a 'system' which they cannot change, but that some of the school's own internal practices such as those related to assessment and the communication of what the school values, also perpetuate and contribute to a philosophy which is not in line with the espoused ethos of the school. This raises the question of how a Christian school such as Oasis can maintain the integrity of its vision within the context of the broader educational field. Edlin (1999) suggested that this requires, intentionality, hard work and engagement at all levels of the school community – the board, teachers, parents and students.

5.4.3 Assessment of academics versus assessment of attributes

A related area of tension described by the respondents that I identified was between what they *are* assessing and what they felt they *should* be assessing. Whilst the school's goal is for a holistic approach to student learning, there was general agreement that assessment tended to be limited largely to just one narrow element which the teachers invariably described as 'academics'. Renee described this dichotomy between the school's view of human flourishing and its assessment practices in the following way:

> *I think human flourishing takes into account more a holistic view of the student and cares for their spiritual, their physical, their emotional wellbeing and academic development, all of that, whereas assessment is more just the academic side of that.* (Renee, 97-100)

This view was supported by Sarah who described Christian ethos and assessment practices as "running beside one another but not yet intersecting" (Sarah, 178-179) and Michael who described the struggle as trying to "marry the two" (Michael, 252).

The areas identified by respondents for assessment were content, knowledge and skills, students' understanding of a Christian ethos and worldview, and students' development of 'Christlike' attributes. Overwhelmingly, the respondents felt that the school assessment focus is "content and skills driven" (Angela, 137) though a number of teachers agreed that the school was currently working to address what they perceived as a "mismatch" (Lyndell, 153) between what the school promotes as valued and what is actually assessed and reported. However, most teachers felt that there was always a priority on assessing the curriculum content and outcomes identified in the Australian Curriculum.

In line with Christian education literature (Schultz, 2012; Van Brummelen, 2009), every respondent articulated a view that the school should be endeavouring to assess and report on aspects of learning and development consistent with its ethos, but there was also a view that this is not something that is currently done well, intentionally, consistently, or even done at all.

> *In a Christian school context, it [assessment] should also incorporate what they [the students] know of God's role in that subject or how ethics plays into it, things like that. But, thinking about it, I'm wondering how well we actually do that.* (Rebecca, 26-29)

When asked why there was no assessment of students' understanding of Christian ethos, Rebecca responded, "I don't know why we don't assess it, because I guess I've never thought of it before" (Rebecca, 50).

I noted that the struggle the teachers' expressed was not just to overcome the forces that pull the school towards the dominant paradigm of individualistic, competitive, high stakes testing, but also in knowing what assessing Christian ethos would look like in practice. Michael described this as a "grey area" (Michael, 112). Some teachers were keen to make it clear that

the goal was not about trying to "quantify a student's faith" (Renee, 171) or determine "how Christian" a student might be (Angela, 162), and that attempting to do so would be problematic. Many posited, however, that it should be possible to assess understanding of biblical principles (Renee, 221; Angela, 126; Julie, 142; Rebecca, 112), ethics (Rebecca, 27), articulation of a biblical worldview in relation to the subject content (Renee, 221-231; Helen, 78) and demonstration of Christian values (Sarah, 90-91). However, there was much less certainty about *how* this could be done. This is not surprising given the scarcity of strategies or tools currently available to Christian schools and their teachers. That said, many of the respondents did say that the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* were helping them in navigating this tension.

> *Interviewer:* *Do you think the Attributes help at all?*
> *Rebecca:* *Yeah. They definitely do because you can see a clear link between the Attributes and assessments.* (Rebecca, 347-349)

Many respondents were able to give examples of how they had, when working collaboratively with peers, been able to see ways in which the *Attributes* could be included in assessment tasks and felt it was possible to create rubrics which would then enable a student's progress in these areas to be measured. This begins to shine a light on the fact that a key to navigating tensions between Christian ethos and assessment practices is firstly teachers working together to solve problems and, secondly, the provision of tools and scaffolding. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Most respondents felt that values and attributes were much more difficult to measure than 'academics' and would therefore require a "different type of assessment" (Clare, 218) and "reports that read a whole lot differently" (Angela, 189). Peter was concerned that assessment of ethos should not be trivialised or seen as adding "extra bits" on to a report. Rather, he felt there has to be an authenticity and integrity about how assessments are derived (Peter 846-852). Chris raised the issue of not conflating different elements of assessment so that they become meaningless. He described how it would be a "nonsensical" to have an academic assessment and an assessment of the *Attributes* and then to try to add them together to form an overall result" (Chris 227-233).

As will be discussed further in the following section, Chris's comment is perhaps an example of the compartmentalising of 'academics' and 'ethos'. A fundamental assumption of Christian theology and Christian school curriculum is that "all truth is God's truth" (Augustine)

regardless of whether it is dealing with maths, nature, society, physics, the arts, church history or religion. According to Knight (2007), when schools fail to recognise this, the result is the acceptance of a false dichotomy between the secular and the religious. The challenge, it would seem, is in the practical application of an epistemology that recognises God as the creator and source of all truth and the Bible as a "foundation and context for all human knowledge" (Knight, 2007, p. 228).

The other tension I identified was in relation to how results might be expressed. It was not seen as appropriate to give a numeric grade for a "non-academic" attribute such as compassion. However, not using a familiar grading system was also seen as problematic.

Chris: *I don't know how you include those things. It's very hard to give them a mark. I think unfortunately back to earlier on because parents and kids are concerned about marks, as soon as you don't give them a mark they're viewed as less important, and so, you know, you're then stuck because even if you try and put them on, you know, if you put them on as attitude things and say, you know, they're compassionate, or they're good at collaboration, or something like that that's a tick box, I don't know how much weight they would carry with, you know, kids or parents because they're going oh, you know, "Well how many percent's it worth on my report?" is the first question the kids ask, you know. So, yeah, I'm not sure how you report on them. It's a challenge…*

I think the only thing then is we probably need to watch that if one's a numerical mark and one's a something else, the attention will always go to the numerical mark, you know, or the A, B, C

Interviewer: *Why do you think that is?*

Chris: *Oh, just conditioning and that's what the kids want to know. I mean, yeah, because they're so used to that, that's the world they're in and that's what classes have always been, and that's what they see on TV shows and, you know, that's what they see everywhere.* (Chris, 247-255)

Chris's comments are testament to the power of habitus and the rules of the field. In the end, grades are so embedded as the prized form of capital in the education field that it is difficult to break from this. Parents and teachers want students to leave school with cultural capital which

will position them well in the various fields in which they will participate, particularly the fields of further education and economics. At the same time, the school seeks to cultivate spiritual resources and a faith habitus. The teachers tend to see these goals in a binary fashion, thus creating a tension that they struggle to resolve. If this is to be overcome, then the habituated ways of thinking of teachers, students and parents would have to be challenged and new ways of conceptualising both learning and assessment developed.

5.4.4 Christian ethos - compartmentalised versus integrated

A theme I detected in a number of the interviews was the problem of Christian ethos and academic learning being seen as two separate elements, and the allied problem of trying to combine them and treat them with equal value within assessment and reporting practices. Many of the respondents noted that, as per the school vision statement, the gospel should be an integral part of all school practices rather than something "siloed" off on the side. In their exploration of this challenge in the context of our interviews, the majority of the respondents spoke, in various ways, about needing to bring the two elements together and the fact that the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* could provide a vehicle for doing so.

> *I still think we've been a little bit compartmentalised in our approach which is why the Attributes are now becoming so valuable because it … you've got like your two train tracks and it makes them cross.* (Sarah, 186-187)

In a conversation about having a goal for both "top academic marks" and developing Christlike character, Michael reflected on 'bringing together' the two elements:

> *Yes, how do you marry the two? I think that's the challenge. I think if you, I'd argue, I would argue personally if we … focused on these Attributes … I think students would, ideally, be fine academically or learn, or know how to study.* (Michael, 252-256)

The teachers also noted that this compartmentalization occurs in the way student progress is formally reported.

> *The only feedback we give to parents currently on Christlikeness and the Christian worldview that a student might demonstrate in our class is in the pastoral comment box of 800 characters where you've got to comment on classroom behaviour, strategies for improvement, Christian studies, and a general comment. It's such a little component it doesn't give the student justice.* (Helen, 259-265)

Chris spoke at length of his view that "biblical human flourishing is much broader than I think we report on" (Chris, 165). Angela felt that, "we're not focusing too much when we're writing reports on the child, it's more about the content and skills" (Angela, 261-262). She conceded that the pastoral comment gave some opportunity to talk about a student's development of character but said that, "We don't report on it within the curriculum. We've separated that off and called it a pastoral comment, just little bits about your child and the rest of it is about the curriculum" (Angela, 268-270).

Schultz (2002, p. 14) writes about the "danger of dualism" in Christian education. By this he is referring to the practice of dividing education into the 'spiritual' and the 'secular' and of separation of values from knowledge. The contention here is that God, faith, spirituality and one's relationship with Christ cannot be disconnected or separated from any other part of life. Therefore, this identified 'compartmentalisation' is actually at odds with the core and heart of what Christian education is about.

When questioned as to why these two areas were separated rather than integrated, many respondents spoke about the pressure of "the system" (Sarah, 162; Lyndell, 157; Renee, 159; Lisa, 393) but the majority of responses centred around, "I don't know" as summed up by Lisa, "I don't know how you would feasibly make it work" (Lisa, 457) and Chris, "I don't know the answer" (Chris, 185). Interestingly, although she said she "didn't know" how to incorporate ethos into her assessment practices, in one part of her interview Lisa was able to provide an example of how it might be done:

> *To be honest, I hadn't really thought about it. I had considered, because we just did a topic in my Year 10 class on refugees, and I thought, and it was only because a student actually wrote about it that made me think, 'Oh, I should change the assessment and bring that Christian ethos into it,' because he'd written about, basically it was about Australia's approach to refugees and he'd written a whole thing on … the Christian response to the refugee crisis and, "This is how we should be responding," and I thought, 'Oh, I should have actually made that part of the assessment, like in your answer somewhere you actually have to look at what a Christian response to this is and back it up Biblically.' But yes, but apart from that I hadn't actually thought of it.* (Lisa, 214-227)

Edlin (2014) refers to the *permeative* function of the Bible. He says, "The Bible is not frosting on an otherwise unaltered humanistic cake. It needs to be the leaven in the educational loaf,

shaping the entire curriculum from its base up as it permeates through the whole school program" (p. 66). Throughout their interviews, the teachers at Oasis Christian College demonstrated their understanding of and commitment to this goal, but the practical application, especially in relation to assessment, is where the challenge lies. This is unsurprising given the forces that this philosophy of education is competing with in the education field and the strength of each teachers own 'education' habitus. However, I argue that it is a challenge that the school and the broader Christian education sector needs to continue to grapple with.

Some Christian education writers argue that the problem, and the source of the dichotomy, is the notion of *faith learning integration* itself (Beech & Beech, 2018; Murison, 2018). Murison (2018) explains it thus:

> The continual use of the word integration reinforces the notion that faith and learning are separate and must be put back together. This is an approach which stands in contradiction to the idea all truth is God's truth. The faith learning integration approach to Christian education creates a potential self-fulfilling dualistic prophecy which makes the task of Christian teachers much more challenging. (p. 95)

Murison's argument that having to integrate Christian ethos into curriculum creates difficulty and extra work and is not intuitive for teachers, is supported by the data in this study. Murison suggests that, rather than seeing the process as one of 'integration', to instead reconceptualise it as one of 'revelation'. In other words, consider how God might be revealing himself through the material to be taught or "in simple terms, seeing God in the content rather than trying to put Him back into it" (Murison, 2018, p. 98). Beech and Beech (2018) raise the same concerns regarding dualistic approaches to the integration of faith and academics (or truth and un-truth) and suggest replacing an integrationalist approach with an integrality of truth approach. Such an approach would recognise the Lordship of Christ over all things, reclaiming all truth as God's truth. In a similar way to Murison (2018), Beech and Beech (2018) describe knowledge attainment as the "*unhiding* of God-owned truth" (Beech & Beech, 2018, p. 90 italics added).

The teachers' comments, along with the literature, have led me to speculate on not just the difficulty of trying to integrate ethos into all aspects of learning, but also the fact of teachers being 'habituated' into not doing so. Whilst the respondents were generally not quite sure of the solution, they were none-the-less confident that successfully valuing ethos, attributes and

biblical worldview, whilst difficult, was nonetheless "doable" (Michael, 378). They felt that the school had begun to put some strategies in place and that, through professional learning opportunities at the school, they were "well positioned" to make progress in the right direction. The danger remains though of continuing to see 'ethos' and 'academics' as two very separate things. In the following Chapter I return to the role of professional learning opportunities in navigating these questions.

5.4.5 Individualised competitiveness versus learning in community

The concept of 'community' features strongly in Oasis Christian College's official discourse. The school documentation makes it clear that the notion of community, derived from Biblical principles, is of great importance at Oasis Christian College. First, with regard to community, is the relationship between the school and its parent body. The importance and prioritisation of this partnership is clearly articulated in the school Mission Statement:

> The mission of Oasis Christian College is to develop within each student the desire and ability to fulfil God's will in their lives. This is achieved in partnership with parents and the wider community.

This notion of community appears throughout the school website. This is evident in references to the need for a sense of belonging, relationships being conducted according to Christian principles and values, acknowledgment of the importance of the family, the priority on activities that promote community, connections with the wider community beyond the school, and a desire for students to have a positive impact on the community. In addition, the importance of learning in community is espoused within the Christian education literature (Edlin, 1999; Freytag, 2008; Stronks & Blomberg, 1993; Van Brummelen, 2009), as well as by educators more broadly (Care et al., 2012; Delandshere, 2001; Fleer, 2015).

Despite this, however, I noted that Oasis Christian College documents in relation to learning and teaching and assessment refer very little to the notion of community and only one respondent really spoke of tension around the fact that the dominant forms of assessment focus largely on the individual, thus reinforcing education as an individual endeavour. Chris was the respondent who raised this point, as he reflected on a presentation he had heard some years previously at a Christian educator's conference.

> *He talked about the way we teach, like our teaching practices, how we sit, how we mark, it is all individual. You know, if we're sitting kids separately and saying well*

> *you do your work, and it's just your work and you get the reward for it how is that not encouraging selfishness, you know?* (Chris, 323-326)

Chris's comment highlights the tension between the biblical notion of the 'body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 1:12), with its focus on each person fulfilling their role for the benefit of the whole, and the potentially competitive nature of acquiring cultural and social capital through schooling. Assessment practices in particular can exemplify the kind of individualised competitiveness which disregards the importance of collaboration and the social nature of learning (Delandshere, 2001; Edlin, 1999; Elwood & Murphy, 2015; Fleer, 2015). Elwood and Murphy (2015) argue that both summative and formative assessment which is underpinned by a constructivist view "still tend to treat students within these arenas as individuals and only look in to the individual to consider learning and achievement" (p. 186). Elwood and Murphy (2015) go on to suggest the adoption of a sociocultural approach to viewing learning and assessment – an approach which considers "the larger social, historical, political and economic activities that shape the activity" (p. 187) and which "treats assessment as a social practice" (p.189). Certainly, for Christian schools that promote the importance of community and relationships, a highly individualistic approach to assessment would seem incongruent. The fact that only one teacher raised this concern in their interview is perhaps another example of how ingrained and habituated the dominant assessment practices are which would suggest the need for this to be challenged at an institutional, not just individual, level.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described and interpreted what the teachers told me about the relationship between the espoused philosophy of Oasis Christian College, the broader education field and the school's assessment practices, thus answering the first research question: *How do teachers at Oasis Christian College describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?* My analysis of the data concludes that they experience this relationship as a struggle between competing systems of beliefs, values, and practices. As an institution, Oasis Christian College overlaps both the religion and education fields and is subject to pressures from the economic field. The teachers articulated a number of areas of contestation at the intersection of these fields including worldviews, government policies and parent expectations.

Whilst the school's Christian ethos is clearly articulated in its official documentation and the teachers' expressed beliefs and understandings aligned with this, they none-the-less described the school's prevailing approaches to assessment as being in tension with its underpinning Christian ethos. Along with their commitment to Christian ethos and the development of faith habitus, the teachers, as agents in the education field, have also long been acclimatised to a system which privileges, cultivates and reproduces a "cultural arbitrary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). Traditional, high stakes assessment practices are a key vehicle for this. The teachers consistently spoke about Christian ethos and assessment practices in binary terms and, for the most part, found it difficult to conceptualise a way to coalesce the two. In line with the school's vision and mission, the teachers very much want to ensure that Christian ethos and the goal for the development and distribution of spiritual resources are the drivers behind all practices, including those related to assessment. However, they did not feel that this was presently the case.

Despite the structures of the field, the struggle for capital and the education habitus' of the teachers, there still exists potential for agency and change (Grenfell, 2014). The following chapter will explore how the teachers responded when asked about the role professional learning might play in assisting them to navigate the tensions they described in relation to ethos and assessment.

Chapter 6: Findings & Discussion – Research Question 2

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how the teachers in this study described the relationship between the Christian ethos of Oasis Christian College and their assessment practices. This relationship can be conceptualised as a struggle between competing systems of beliefs, values and purposes. The data discussed in the previous chapter highlights the way in which the teachers' own habitus along with the capital which they have accumulated within the education 'system', has a bearing on their practice. Their desire to cultivate and foster a faith habitus in students through the free and equitable sharing of spiritual resources, sits in tension with requirements to engage in high stakes testing regimes which privilege only certain gifts and talents and, therefore, only certain students. The teachers described this tension as one that they struggle to resolve.

The goal of this chapter is to describe and interpret the teachers' perspectives regarding how professional learning might support them in negotiating the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices within the context of their school, thus responding to the second research question:

> *How do teachers in a Christian school perceive the value of various forms of professional learning in supporting them to navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices?*

In order to explore respondents' views, the following key question was asked in the interviews: *What factors do you believe help/hinder the development of your assessment practices, particularly in relation to aligning them with Christian ethos?* A number of prompts were also used. As outlined in section 4.7, these prompts were in the form of quotes that were drawn from notes and artefacts from previous staff professional learning workshops. In these workshops (which are described in Section 5.2.2), staff were asked, in collaborative groups, to consider what they thought that students at Oasis Christian College learnt about biblical human flourishing through their time at the school. These conversations identified a number of tensions and potential dichotomies. During the research interviews for this study, some of these were then presented back to the respondents as a stimulus.

In this chapter I argue that evidence from this study suggests that the first step towards navigating these tensions is to be able to 'make the fish aware of the water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992); in other words, to create an environment which enables teachers to become

more aware of the field in which they operate. I argue, therefore, that tensions cannot be navigated until they are first clearly identified and acknowledged at both the institutional and the individual levels. The data indicate the teachers understood that a pre-requisite for changing teacher assessment practice is the need to challenge their conceptions of assessment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the habitus' of each of the teachers at Oasis Christian College have likely pre-conditioned them to accept the rules of 'the system' and to prioritise certain forms of capital. The structures of the broader education field further strengthen this.

As previously outlined, in Bourdieu's view, institutionalised education was designed precisely to determine, celebrate and favour those who would progress through to higher education and take up positions of privilege within society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In doing so, it "reproduces the uneven distribution of cultural capital among the groups and classes which inhabit the social space in question" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 105). For Bourdieu, the everyday practices of schools, including assessment regimes and key rituals, are a form of symbolic violence which serve to reinforce cultural and social domination and do so in a way that participants, such as teachers and students, take for granted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The practices, structures, relations and language of the education field serve to shape the habitus of both students and teachers. "In other words, field and habitus constitute a dialectic through which specific practices produce and reproduce the social world that at the same time is making them" (Thomson, 2014, p. 73). I suggest that, given the opportunity to reflect, teachers in this study appeared to express an awareness of the opposing forces of the education and religious fields and a desire to counteract the symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) which they and their students experience. However, they also understood that this was something that could not be overcome by an individual, but rather needed to occur at the institutional level with intentional questioning of and attention to cultural integrity.

One aspect of analysing the data for this chapter was to search deductively for evidence of characteristics of effective professional learning, as outlined in the literature and highlighted in chapter 2. The teachers' responses affirmed many of these and, in addition, included other ideas about what would serve to bring together what was described as the 'parallel lines' (Sarah, 184-187) of Christian ethos and assessment. In thinking about what might help or hinder them as they negotiate between two fields, many of the teachers spoke directly about professional learning experiences they had already participated in and found helpful. They also had thoughts about future possible professional learning approaches.

In this chapter, I describe and analyse the teachers' responses around five key themes that I have determined summarise what the teachers perceived was required to bring about alignment of Christian ethos and assessment practices, and therefore begin to navigate the tensions outlined in chapter 5. These are:

- The need for cultural shift
- Professional learning needs a clear and common focus
- Professional learning needs to be collaborative
- Professional learning needs to be embedded in practice and sustained over time
- Teachers benefit from scaffolding and resources

6.2 The need for Cultural Shift

For the purposes of this thesis, culture is defined according to the Bourdieuian notion of a cultural field. A cultural field is "a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories and appointments which constitutes an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities" (Webb et al., 2002, pp. x-xi). Furthermore, a cultural field is characterised by the conflict generated when individuals or groups endeavour to determine what constitutes capital within that field and how that capital is to be shared.

In thinking about what might better support their capacity to align ethos and assessment, the majority of respondents felt that there needed to be a fundamental 'cultural shift' in terms of the underpinning worldview and the way in which this manifests in the practices associated with assessment at Oasis Christian College. I interpret the teachers' comments to mean that the school's dominant discourses, rituals and conventions in relation to assessment tend to reflect the broader education 'system' and privilege and confer certain forms of cultural capital over others thus resulting in a misalignment with what is espoused as valued in the school's official documentation. In other words, the school practices are perceived to be an acceptance of an underlying set of presuppositions about the learner and the purpose of education that sit in conflict with a biblical worldview. Furthermore, the teachers' comments suggest that, in order to move towards greater mission-practice alignment, there would need to be strategic intentionality around changing these discourses and rituals and authentically embedding the school's cultural distinctiveness in relation to assessment practices.

Interviewer: *So what do you think would be the things that would actually help to develop assessment practices in line with the Christian ethos and what you have been talking about?*

Lyndell: *Well if I went right back, then obviously developing a culture with staff that would see the value, which I think we're doing, to see the value of that. And then creating that self-awareness that causes us to then question what we're doing to see if there is a match-up there or if there is discord between those and understand where the discord is and why? Yes, creating that self-awareness with the staff.* (Lyndell, 230-239)

Lyndell also spoke about the need to create a stronger "Christian education culture" (Lyndell, 221). In speaking about the concept of biblical human flourishing, Sarah felt that there was not yet a clear and shared understanding of what this meant and that a "new language" and "cultural identity" (Sarah, 268-269) needed to be established. Renee also identified that the establishment of this new culture depended, in part, on creating the conditions that enable teachers to reflect on their practice and move outside of long-held and habituated ways of thinking:

> *Teachers need to change their mindset on what assessment actually is in order for this to work to integrate the different Attributes. And they would just need time and space around that so that because, yeah, the academic mindset is very much, "What is the task, what do they need to achieve to tick X, Y, Z?" Then we're bringing these others where we want them to tick a different list, and so assessment mindset would have to no longer just be about this [academics] but about a more holistic approach to a child's learning.* (Renee, 229-237)

In reflecting on their perspectives about the nature of what is valued in the school, the teachers invariably referred to key school rituals such as student assemblies and the school presentation night where awards are bestowed (Lyndell, 311; Dominic, 208; Rebecca, 183). There was acknowledgement amongst some of the teachers that, in recent times, there had been attempts at Oasis Christian College to more formally recognise and promote other achievements such as sport and music (Sarah, 279-290). However, both in the interview data and the notes from professional learning workshops, there was a sense that the greatest focus was still on academic achievement: "Elitism is still part of the culture though. Rarely are students who up their grade from a D to a B celebrated, nor the student who does a personal best at athletics applauded, only the winners" (Feedback notes from professional learning workshop, 21/01/16).

Lyndell said, “From where I sit, there’s a strong value on results, on completing the course content” (Lyndell, 132). In thinking about this notion of the school being “focused on the celebration of high academic achievers and winners” (Feedback notes from professional learning workshop, Jan 2, 2016) as opposed to a student who might have improved their grades or achieved a personal best or excelled in a ‘non-academic’ area, the respondents identified what is recognised in a Bourdieuian conceptualisation, as the dominant discourse of the heteronomous forces. Bourdieu’s conception of field:

> draws a distinction between the autonomous pole of a field (that which tends to be isolated and removed from the rest of society) and the heteronomous pole of the same field (that which is bound up very closely in relations with the rest of society. (Webb et al., 2002, p.107)

In the context of the sub-field of Christian education, the autonomous pole would include those underpinning views of both the learner and of the purpose of Christian education that stem from a biblical worldview. The Oasis Christian College mission “to develop within each student the desire and ability to fulfil God’s will in their lives” (Oasis Christian College Mission Statement) reflects the autonomous pole of the Christian education field which seeks to nurture and prioritise the development of each child’s academic, physical, social, emotional *and* spiritual growth. This mission can be seen as a force that is internal to the field of Christian education. However, this autonomy is relative to external forces from the field of power, namely the domination of the economic field (Bourdieu, 1990a).

It can be argued that the broader fields of education and economics exert pressure on schools to judge school success according to economic or business models. Mangez & Hilgers (2012) describe the impact of the field of power on education as “an opposition between those who conceive education as an autonomous domain primarily concerned with cultural matters and those who emphasise education in relation to external concerns such as economic prosperity and competitiveness” (Mangez & Hilgers, 2012, p. 192). Mangez & Hilgers go on to argue that external economic forces and international pressure for competitiveness drive much of education policy. Indeed, the language and concepts used by governments and policy-makers such as ‘benchmarking’, ‘targets’, ‘quality control’ and ‘league tables’ in relation to education, and particularly assessment, reflect business-like thinking and economic outputs rather than the holistic development and nurture of each child. The types of rituals mentioned by the teachers are reflective of the school’s function of producing and reproducing the dominant culture and therefore validating the power and status of the middle and upper classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The teachers’ comments suggested that they believe

that the school is subject to this pressure and is struggling against a success paradigm that runs counter to the understanding of success and excellence within the context of a Christian ethos. Furthermore, the teachers experience tension as they struggle to move between the poles and negotiate the forces with which they are confronted.

The teachers' responses demonstrate why a clear and biblical definition of excellence within the Christian school context is so important (Edlin, 1999; Freytag, 2008; Green, 2017; Justins, 2009; Van Brummelen, 2009). It would appear that Oasis Christian College might fit Sadler's description of the Christian school that has unquestioningly accepted society's competitive ethic as 'normal' and failed to conceptualise an alternative (Sadler, 1996). The teachers' comments highlight their belief that the school needs to recognise and challenge this seemingly unquestioned acceptance and then establish its culture as one that clearly privileges a biblical model of excellence, that is, Christlikeness.

The respondents identified a number of attributes and areas that they felt should be given greater value within the school community both formally and informally. As evidenced in the quote above, one of these was a student's academic growth over time (as opposed to just outstanding results). Rather than only celebrating those that achieve high results (sometimes with only minimal growth), Lyndell felt strongly that there needed to be greater acknowledgment of a student's development, especially when it involves struggle and significant effort.

> *But do we acknowledge their development? You know, last year I got the junior to middle kids to go and have morning tea with the Principal. The teachers picked some that really had done that, had really … you know, they might have only grown a little bit but they'd put their all in and they really developed, so that they were celebrated. But do we do that across the College? So I still think there's a message that says, "If you've got your stuff together and you're smart and you can score well and you can win an award then the College values that over … if you struggle and you still try really hard". What do the students tell themselves? "Well, I'm never going to get one of those awards; I won't get acknowledged for my effort". So what do we do with that?* (Lyndell 324-338)

In similar vein, Lisa felt students "that maybe haven't done well academically but are doing really well in other areas," should also be acknowledged (Lisa, 404-405). An example she gave was of students who had engaged in service in the community. Sarah added that a

broader range of pathways should also be recognised. “We should be celebrating pathways other than university; I mean we’re very university focused but not everyone’s going to go to university, so how do we celebrate them?” (Sarah, 365-367).

The teachers’ comments throughout their interviews conveyed a sense of struggle between the privileging of different forms of capital and resources at Oasis Christian College. I argue that they are also reflecting a struggle between competing views in relation to the learner and indeed the purpose of education and, specifically, assessment. This struggle occurs at both the individual and institutional level. Even the underpinning notion of capital itself is a source of tension and needs to be challenged. Just like the small number of awards that students ‘compete’ for on the school Presentation Night, Bourdieu (2011, p. 49) characterises capitals as “scarce” requiring agents to compete for them. In contrast, however, spiritual resources should be shared freely and equitably (Baker & Skinner, 2006; Grace, 2010; Verter, 2003). Many school practices, such as high stakes and standardised assessment, are designed to perpetuate the social order, reproduce social inequity and restrict access to capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The teachers in this study spoke about an alternate worldview and the need to intentionally privilege other practices that promote and inculcate a Christian ethos, foster a faith habitus and enable all students access to capitals.

It is worth noting that the imperative for Oasis Christian College to question assessment practices and the inequitable environment they foster, should not only be motivated by Christian ethos but also by the fact that educational research and literature more broadly is exposing the flaws of high stakes and standardised testing (Berliner, 2011; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Polesel et al., 2013; Torrance, 2015). As Christian schools seek to prepare students for a life of meaningful service beyond school, they need to be mindful of the kinds of skills and attributes that young people require and how these can best be fostered through learning, teaching and assessment practices. It is becoming increasingly evident that high stakes testing does very little to foster learning and, in fact, is often detrimental to it (Baird et al., 2017; Broadfoot & Black, 2004; Delandshere, 2001; Timmis et al., 2016). There exists an opportunity for Christian schools to respond to the research in this area and to be leaders in the development of alternative models which both reflect Christian ethos and will serve to equip and prepare *all* young people for a life of flourishing beyond school.

The teachers’ responses reinforce the idea that the first step towards cultural shift and the development of new practices is ‘making the fish aware of the water’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant,

1992). According to the teachers, as an institution, Oasis Christian College needs to reflect on and evaluate its practices in light of its espoused ethos in order to address tensions and incongruities. I therefore conclude that all professional learning engaged in by teachers at Oasis Christian College must be thoughtfully and carefully designed so that it is underpinned and anchored in a biblical worldview and Christian ethos and that these need to be made explicit. The risk in not being intentional about this is mission drift. An encouraging aspect of the data in this study is that when provided with time and opportunity to work collaboratively, such as in the professional learning workshops which were undertaken as part of the development of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes*, the data has shown that teachers are willing and able to think reflectively, honestly and creatively about both underpinning philosophies of practices as well as how things might be done differently. This was particularly evidenced in the notes from professional learning workshops where a significant number of suggestions were provided regarding how the school might address and re-shape some of its discourses and key rituals to ensure that they are aligned with Christian ethos.

In addition, though, it needs to be noted that a field is a social space made up of individuals. These individuals each have their own assumptions, values, beliefs and distinctions that both structure and are structured by the field (Grenfell, 2014; Rey, 2007). It follows therefore, that any re-shaping of the 'structure' of the field will also require attention to the re-shaping or further development of the habituses of the individuals within that field. This would suggest a step beyond 'making the fish aware of the water', but also 'changing the water'. In other words, some re-thinking around how the Christian ethos of the school is applied to practices.

6.3 Professional Learning Needs a Clear and Common Focus

When asked what she thought would help her more effectively integrate Christian ethos into assessment practices, Rebecca (241, 252) spoke about the importance of "everyone being focused on the same thing" and "working together towards a common goal". Similarly, Michael verbalised the importance of "whole school focus" (Michael, 308) and professional learning being effective when "there's a point to the PD and we know the point before we get there" (Michael, 148-149). He then went on to say that "it [the challenge of how to align ethos and assessment] has to always be in our face" (Michael, 317). Michael felt that ensuring that the issue of aligning Christian ethos and assessment practices was a whole school focus and regularly on the agenda in faculty meetings would create an accountability that would support development and improvement. John's view was that, "It does help to have priorities, and they need to be a few priorities, not a large number of priorities" (John, 680-682). He spoke of

being “bombarded by so much” and felt that it was important that someone (and by implication, that someone would most likely be a leader) wade through the literature to help to identify what is most important and most useful to staff (John, 655-665). These comments appear to support the literature which suggests that, in order to be effective, professional learning needs to be focused on specific areas of need (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Timperley, 2005) and approached collectively as a community of practice (Borko et al., 2010; Doecke et al., 2008).

In thinking about exactly what professional learning at Oasis Christian College might need to be focused on in order for it to support teachers to successfully navigate the relationship between ethos and assessment, the respondents offered a number of suggestions. Michael felt that, for teachers to meaningfully tackle the challenge of integrating Christian ethos into their curriculum and assessment, in their first years of teaching they need to focus on “getting their heads around content” (Michael, 75). His view was that teachers first needed to be strong in state mandated curriculum content before tackling the task of incorporating “Christ-like perspectives”. In his view, “it’s too hard for a new teacher to do that all at once” (Michael, 79). On the one hand, Michael’s comments support the literature in identifying the importance of subject content knowledge being a focus of professional learning (Borko, 2004; Fishman et al., 2003; Schleicher, 2011). However, I contend that Michael’s response also reflects the compartmentalisation of both content and Christian ethos and the habituation of privileging high stakes subject domains rather than the holistic approach espoused by the school. His comments reflect the problem of ‘spiritual’ and ‘secular’ divide in Christian education as described by Schultz (2002). Why doesn’t Michael consider that “content” and “Christ-like perspectives” could both be focused on at the same time rather than in a dualistic manner?

Michael’s comments also highlight the importance of professional learning being differentiated for individual teachers according to their needs as well as for individual school contexts rather than ‘one size fits all’ (Hill, 2011; Livingston & Hutchinson, 2017; Webb & Jones, 2009). Coombs et.al. (2018) found that teachers’ approaches to assessment differed across career stages and, therefore, whilst all teachers must learn certain assessment policies and practices, professional learning opportunities should be tailored according to career stage and need.

In line with the literature (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Ball & Cohen, 1999), Julie spoke about the importance of increasing her general teaching and learning knowledge of assessment practices when she said:

> *Well … it's developing my own skills in assessment. I need to know all the forms of assessment. I need to know how to analyse the assessment, I need to develop in my practice so that I can detect all, identify all the weak areas of the students. I need to know how to re-teach in a way that they understand it, how to re-test it in a way that they would be able to display their abilities and show me that they understood.* (Julie, 299-306)

As a teacher-leader with many years of experience, Julie is highlighting the fact that her knowledge and capacity to use sound assessment practices must be current and her training ongoing. The *Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) support this notion that teachers need to continue to develop their knowledge and skills in all areas of pedagogical practice in order to meet the needs of their 21st century students. In the Christian school context, this would include ensuring that these practices are consistent with the school's Christian ethos.

In this vein, Michael highlighted the importance of formative assessment practices such as clear learning intentions, success criteria and ongoing feedback when he said:

> *I think feedback is probably the most important thing when it comes to potential because you've got to show them … "This is where you're at and this is where you're expected …" but you've got to do that multiple times, and I think, in year's past, we haven't been doing that. We just said, "This is what I expect of you," or maybe we haven't even been communicating what we expect, we just … blindside them. But … I think, I mean for me personally, because of our professional learning I have been … pretty explicit on going, "Hey, this is what I'm seeing from you".* (Michael, 130-141)

A number of respondents also spoke about the importance of teachers knowing how to support students to grow in their learning (Chris, 70: Julie, 66-68; Dominic, 138-139; John 421-427) as opposed to just providing a summative assessment and "reducing people to a mark" (Chris, 66). This aligns with the literature in relation to Christian schooling which also suggests that assessment in the Christian school should focus more on formative assessment practices that will foster formation towards the notion of 'biblical flourishing' (Hill, 1989;

Maple, 2014; Rooney, 2009). More broadly within the education sector, the literature also identifies a push for greater emphasis on formative assessment practices in order to ensure that student learning is the key focus (Black & Wiliam, 2009, 2014; Cauley & McMillan, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In line with this, the teachers in this study identified that feedback which provides opportunity for students to grow and to develop into their full God-given potential and which leads to the improvement of learning needs to be prioritised.

Michael's comment above also suggests the perceived value and impact of the professional learning that he has engaged in with his peers at Oasis Christian College in relation to formative assessment. As an insider researcher and the facilitator of professional learning strategy within the school, I am able to make greater sense of the references made by teachers regarding professional learning undertaken within the school context. The professional learning referred to by Michael involved regular workshops on the various elements of formative assessment practice, the sharing of concrete strategies and resources, trialling of these strategies by individual teachers in their own classrooms and peer observation and feedback. During his interview, Michael identified that this process had enabled him to hold up a mirror to his own practice, had changed his thinking around the need to make learning transparent for students and, in turn, had led to the adoption of new practices in relation to this. Michael's reflection, and others like it, support the research findings that professional learning is most effective when it is focused, embedded in practice, sustained over time and engaged in collaboratively.

The teachers also understood that they need to be equipped in their capacity to differentiate assessment if they are to implement practices that are consistent with the underlying belief that each child is unique and has different gifts. Angela spoke about having an expectation that "every child will grow and develop and learn" (Angela, 303-304) and that this required the capacity to develop detailed individual learning programs and achievable goals for each student. Coombs et.al (2018) found that it is not until teachers are established as professionals in their careers that they are likely to prioritize formative and differentiated assessment practices. Given this finding, I contend, therefore, that early career teachers would particularly require greater support in this area. It also adds further weight to the importance of teachers working in collaboration with peers at different career stages.

In considering the focus of professional learning, teachers also articulated that there needs to be further consideration of exactly *what* is assessed and for this to authentically move beyond

just ‘academic achievements’ to include a broader range of attitudes, skills, habits and values as articulated in the literature (Berlach, 2002; Hannon, 2017; Treadwell, 2017). Renee summed this up when she said, “Assessment mindset would have to no longer just be about ticking boxes [of academic achievement] but about a more holistic approach to a child’s learning” (Renee, 235-237). John referred back to the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* saying “as a framework, it makes a lot of sense because it points us towards considering the student holistically and beyond simply academic achievement” (John, 208-209). Whilst the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* was found by the teachers to be a step in the right direction, both the literature and my personal experience within the Christian school sector suggest that practical models for how to assess or measure attitudes, skills, values and ‘godly character’ remain scarce. Clearly, this should continue to be a professional learning focus for Oasis Christian College and the Christian schooling sector more broadly.

In reflecting further areas for professional learning focus at Oasis Christian College, the conversations with the teachers reminded me of the fact that the majority of them completed their teacher training degrees in secular institutions which means that they were not required, encouraged or supported in the process of developing curriculum or assessment practices which specifically reflect Christian ethos (Murison, 2018). Furthermore, and compounding this, studies have shown that pre-service teacher education programs have significant influence on teachers’ knowledge, skills and conceptions of assessment (Coombs et al., 2018; DeLuca et al., 2016). This highlights that a challenge for Christian schools is the fact that the majority of teachers come to them with already developed conceptions about teaching “particular things” in “particular ways” (Schubert, 2014, p. 184) which may not be congruent with Christian ethos. The literature suggests that if professional learning related to assessment is to be successful in changing teacher assessment practices, it must address teachers’ underlying conceptions, beliefs and values about assessment (Brown, 2004; Dixon et al., 2011; Webb & Jones, 2009) as well as provide opportunity for teachers to acquire new knowledge and skills (Andersson & Palm, 2018). This, therefore, would suggest that, in the ideal, teachers preparing for Christian school context would benefit from specific and intentional training that supports them in development of underpinning beliefs that are consistent with Christian ethos. Failing that, it indicates that teachers already in a Christian school might require some level of re-training for the Christian school context, preferably at the point of induction as well as ongoing.

A further identified area for professional learning focus was the teachers' own personal faith and their level of biblical literacy. A number of respondents felt, that in order to navigate this struggle between valuing both Christian ethos and academic achievement, support was needed to find ways to "marry the two" (Michael, 342), "make the two train tracks cross" (Sarah 187) and "bring the two together" (John, 585). Respondents felt that the divide they perceived between Christian ethos and the underlying political and economic purposes of high stakes assessment practices (Timmis et al., 2016) could not be bridged unless teachers had developed a strong personal faith (Julie, 16-23; Michael, 27-31; Sarah, 374-380), a passion for the gospel (Rebecca, 305-307; Clare, 267) and strong biblical foundations (Rebecca, 290-293). Angela highlighted this when she said,

> *We've got some teachers here who will … who will find it difficult because they don't know about the Bible, and that's really difficult to make some connections.* (Angela, 340-342)

This is also in line with the school's documentation, which states that "foundational Christian thinking is an integral part of staff professional learning" (Oasis Christian College Website - *Christian Expression*). I contend that the respondents perceived that professional learning that focuses on raising the levels of biblical literacy of teachers is one of several factors that are key to addressing tensions between Christian ethos and assessment practices at Oasis Christian College.

The teachers' comments recognise the importance of the continued accumulation of the teachers' spiritual resources and development of faith habitus. As discussed in Section 5.2.4, the participants in this study spoke about the importance of the teacher 'embodying' the gospel if the school vision is to be achieved. There was a clear understanding that the worldview of the teacher has a significant influence on the shaping of the worldview of the learner (Murison, 2018; Schultz, 2002). This aligns with the broader body of research, which identifies that teachers and what they do (which is an outworking of their underlying values and beliefs) matter (Hattie, 1992, 2009; Jensen, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005; Slater et al., 2012; Wiliam, 2010b). There was a perspective among many of the participants in this study that this was a potential area of weakness at Oasis Christian College. That is, that many of the teachers did not have a well-developed understanding of Christian theology and the Bible. Increasing the level of biblical literacy and fostering staff spiritual growth were seen as imperative. This would somewhat equate with the notion of "theological literacy" which, in the Catholic school context, was

argued to be “relatively neglected therefore threatening the long term vitality, authenticity and distinctiveness of the Catholic education mission” (Webb as quoted in Grace, 2010, p. 120). Further study of the Bible and the manner in which this might influence practices within the Christian school context would contribute to strengthening the Christian ethos and vision going forward by helping to expose and address any existing underlying beliefs and values that run counter to it.

Bourdieu’s formula *(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice* (Bourdieu, 1984), highlights the fact that the teachers’ embodied dispositions and cultural capital have a significant influence on their practice. The formula also draws attention to the role of the context in which teachers find themselves (the field with its rules, assumptions and beliefs) in also shaping practice. Given that fields are structured partly through the agency of the individuals which inhabit them and vice versa, it follows that, if you can change the field and the value of the capital within it, this would have a structuring effect on the teachers’ habitus and, in turn, the dynamic of the subfield of Christian education. The field could be changed and the Christian school could be strengthened against the forces and pressures of the broader education field with which it competes, thus resulting in new practices. If this is to be achieved, professional learning, which targets both broadening teachers’ knowledge and skills around assessment practices, and also increases their levels of biblical literacy are viewed by the teachers as key.

These findings raise the question of the potential role of the Christian school associations as well as researchers and thought leaders in supporting both individual schools and the broader sectoral level to hold a mirror up to current thinking and practice as well as identifying practices that better align with the Christian school mission. Whilst the literature recognises that teachers themselves in the context of their workplace generally generate the most powerful learning for teachers, this does not negate the benefits of external experts and their role in stimulating and supporting this learning. It would seem that further discussions regarding how the associations, schools and other experts can work in partnership to interrogate and re-conceptualise the Christian education field would be beneficial.

6.4 Professional Learning Needs to be Collaborative

A key theme, which arose throughout the interviews in relation to professional learning, was the importance of a collaborative approach. Rebecca summed up the thoughts of the group in relation to this when she responded to the question about what she felt would help her more effectively align Christian ethos into assessment practices.

> *I think collaboration. I think if we were working together, if everyone was focused on the same thing, because in school life it does get really busy and the tendency is to go down the path, you know, the easy path, or what we've already been doing. And so to be able to start thinking about new ideas, for me I love bouncing ideas off people, and I think if the whole faculty together is saying this is something that we value and let's look at how we can build our curriculum or we can build our assessment tasks to incorporate these things, I think it's going to be a lot more robust than just one individual person trying to, you know, just bring it in in just one subject. Working together, and building those ideas together, and making it a goal, a common goal will be more effective than just a solo effort.* (Rebecca, 240-250)

It is worth noting, when teachers responded to this question of "What helps you?" the majority of their responses were peppered with the plural pronoun of 'we' indicating that they did not see the solutions as an individual endeavour. Rather, it would seem that the teachers at Oasis Christian College already have a collective sense of ownership and believe that this is of significant importance. The quote from Rebecca above is an example, as is this response from Angela (as demonstrated by the collective nouns shown here in bold font):

> *I think **we** need to go back and review **our** unit writing, and **we've** got some big blank spaces where it says Oasis curriculum, and **we** need to think very carefully about what that might be and how **we** can better integrate not just what **we're** demonstrating and what **we're** teaching, but how then do **we** assess that. If that was **our** goal for this unit then how do **we** put that into an assessment task? And if **we're** going to put it in as an assessment task how then do **we** report it, so there's a whole lot of work to be done around that way of thinking.*

The majority of the respondents spoke about the importance of having time for "discussion" (Chris, 262; Julie, 133; Michael, 153; Renee, 248; John, 727) and "professional conversations" (Sarah, 322) with their faculty teams (Secondary) or year level teams (Primary). However, the value of cross-sectional and cross faculty discussions was also raised. Dominic felt that positive outcomes resulted when teachers were "forced" to engage with staff from different faculties and year levels (Dominic, 501-503) as did Angela when she said that "looking at the *Attributes* with a group of people from different sections of the school was really helpful" (Angela, 321-322).

Sarah invoked a biblical proverb when she said,

> *In two years, I've seen a massive transformation in our school, and I think that, in time the standard's going to be so much higher. But it's that iron sharpening iron, like each one of us is getting better because of deliberate professional development, having structure with teaching and learning, having proper professional conversations, but also having proper leadership.* (Sarah, 316-322)

The proverb, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17) reflects the idea that when iron blades are rubbed together, each becomes sharper and thus more effective. One biblical scholar writes of this verse,

> Iron tools are made sharp, and fit for use, by rubbing them against the file, or some other iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend — Quickens his ingenuity, enlivens his affections, strengthens his judgment, excites him to virtuous and useful actions, and makes him, in all respects, a better man. (Benson, 2017)

Likewise, when teachers work professionally together, Sarah is suggesting that mutual development of practice and learning occurs. Teachers can sharpen each other's practice and, through collaboration, dialogue and accountability, all teachers can improve. Inherent in the respondents' comments is the notion that it is not just about individuals learning and improving, it is about the entire team acquiring new knowledge and skills collaboratively and about the entire team moving its practice forward. The teachers in this study affirmed the notion that the best professional learning takes place in teams and that team learning needs to extend beyond one's faculty or year level. This aligns with the research literature that identifies that professional learning is most effective when it is engaged in collaboratively and in the context of community (Borko et al., 2010; Butler et al., 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; MacBeath, 2012).

Furthermore, the teachers' comments suggest that they see the need to be active participants in, and have collective ownership of, their learning as opposed to just being passively 'developed' as individuals as per some 'traditional' models of professional development critiqued in the 1990s (Loucks-Horsley, 1997; Stein et al., 1999). The research evidence presented in chapter 2 argues that teams of teachers engaged in professional learning together over time can contribute to the establishment of a shared culture and facilitate embedded changes to practice (Garet et al., 2001) and that teacher learning teams are effective in terms of impacting teacher views and practices around assessment (Jonsson et al., 2015). In addition to this, Christian schools see themselves as "communities for learning" (Van Brummelen,

2009) and "members of the body of Christ" (Oasis Christian College Constitution, 2013, p. 8). Given the importance of collaboration from both a professional and a biblical perspective, it is not surprising that the teachers in this study spoke about collaboration as a key strategy that would support them in better aligning assessment practices with ethos. This would suggest that the 'cultural shift' outlined in Section 6.2 above cannot occur unless there is a collective sense of ownership and teachers have time and opportunity to work together as they grapple with tensions in order to learn from one another and develop shared beliefs, understandings and values in relation to assessment.

6.5 Professional Learning Needs to be Embedded in Practice and Sustained Over Time

In line with the literature, teachers in this study also articulated that the type of professional learning that would help them to navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment needed to be situated within their own workplace, draw on expertise from both within and outside of the organisation and sustained over time (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Borko, 2004; Borko et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Hamilton, 2012).

After reflecting on the value of "bringing in external experts" and "looking at best practice elsewhere" John went on to say,

> *Some of it is even in-house best practice as well, you know, sometimes somebody is doing something that's [effective], and you go, "Oh, wow", you know? "Let's have a look at that".* (John, 618-622)

In addition, Sarah raised the notion of the core focus of professional learning permeating or being embedded across a wide range of school practices and forums:

> *I mean it's just [talking about it] again and again, it's repetition isn't it, like if you show it once we'll forget about it two days later, but show it twice, three times, four times, now it's in a curriculum meeting, now it's at an AGM, now it's at a student presentation, like repetition, yeah.* (Sarah, 274-277)

The research in relation to professional learning in Section 2.3.2 and specifically professional learning in relation to assessment as outlined in Section 2.4.5, supports the notion that 'expert knowledge' could come from either within the school or from external facilitators but, either way, it has to be embedded in practice in order to be effective (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Borko, 2004; Hamilton, 2012).

However, as Doecke et al. (2008) note, one of the core challenges of embedding professional learning in the context of the everyday work of teachers is the allocation of time within teachers' workloads to enable meaningful learning with colleagues to take place. This challenge of time, or lack of it, was a recurring theme in this study, both during the various Professional Learning Workshops (as evidenced through the feedback notes) and the interviews with the teachers. This exchange with Lisa summarises the general sentiment of the interview respondents:

Interviewer: *So, in terms of trying to address this kind of tension that you've been talking about, what do you think are the things that help you to develop your practice in this area? Like to develop assessment practice in such a way that might address some of the issues that you're raising?*

Respondent: *I don't know: Time.*

Interviewer: *Yes?*

Respondent: *I think it's a big thing because it's, you know, you have all these great ideas but it's the actual time to actually sit down and work them out and particularly as a faculty as well because I think if you're going to do these sorts of things it should be across the board.* (Lisa, 358-373)

Other respondents talked about the need for time to plan (Sarah, 200; Michael, 297), time for dialogue (Dominic, 485) and time to think (Clare, 224). Renee believed that teachers would need to "change their mindset on what assessment actually is" in order to successfully integrate ethos into assessment practices and that doing so would definitely require "time and space" (Renee, 229-233). One teacher even felt a little embarrassed to suggest that improvement in teacher practice would require time, "Yes, time … I never like to say 'time' because it's the ultimate teacher's excuse but … yes" (Michael, 305-306).

I interpret the data as identifying that a key challenge for Oasis Christian College to resolve is around how time can be created for teachers to successfully engage in embedded professional learning. As Renee pointed out, if teachers are going to change their ingrained and long held views and beliefs about assessment, there needs to be time to reflect and grapple with complex philosophical ideas. After all, dispositions and habitus, as described by Bourdieu, are part of a person's history and shaped over a long period of time (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Therefore, the further enhancement and development of the teachers' faith habitus, which will enable them to better facilitate faith-informed practice, will also take time and intentional strategy.

Unfortunately, ensuring sufficient time for teachers to learn from one another and improve their practice is a challenge for the majority of Australian schools (Jensen et al., 2014). The literature around the importance of teachers having time to work collaboratively is overwhelming, and yet the literature regarding just exactly how to create this time at a practical level, is scarce. Furthermore, some of the few suggested strategies, such as removing teachers from pastoral care activities in order to free up time (Jensen et al., 2014), are problematic for Christian schools where these responsibilities are seen as a core and vital aspect of teacher's work (Maple, 2014). Given the perspective of teachers in this study regarding the importance of the role of time to work together in order to ensure that their assessment practices are aligned with ethos, this is something that the leadership of the school will need to continue to address. And, given that the issue of making time for professional learning is an issue of challenge beyond Oasis Christian College, perhaps this is also one which could be tackled by the Christian school associations at a sector level in terms of the collective development of practical models of timetabling and staffing strategies which might assist schools in overcoming the problem.

In reflecting on the challenges of 'time' and 'workload, a number of respondents remarked that many teachers perceived the incorporation of the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* into their assessment practice as an extra layer (Michael, 27; John, 147), extra work (Renee, 201; Michael, 65; Helen, 210; Angela, 323) and doubling up (Renee, 200). John expressed it like this:

> *I can see it in one place where we were already talking about the Attributes and I look at those Attributes and say, "Well, okay are those Attributes going to be overlaid on what we already have? So, we've got all this Australian Curriculum, meaning all these points, and then are we going to overlay these on top of it? Because then, all of a sudden, now we've got so much more. That becomes a problem because teachers then, they already feel burdened by the Australian Curriculum, put that on top of it, that's adding to that workload; and of course, which one are they going to pay more attention to?* (John, 143-159)

I assert that this comment, and others like it, serve to support the notion discussed in the previous chapter whereby rather than seeing Christian education as a holistic endeavour, many teachers at Oasis Christian College compartmentalise Christian ethos and the broader expectations of the field, particularly those in relation to policy and assessment. Furthermore, their ingrained way of thinking appears to privilege the Australian Curriculum, seeing it as the core business thus relegating the school vision of "integrating the gospel" as an added extra and, for some, seemingly an added burden. This again highlights the power of the teachers' 'education' habitus and the need to create an environment which firstly reveals and makes clear the tensions and then fosters the development of a faith habitus so that the vision for Christian education can be fully embodied and realised.

6.6 Teachers Benefit from Scaffolding and Resources

A metaphor used by one of the participants in this study to describe the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices was that of two lines running in parallel, with the goal being to make them intersect (Sarah, 186). This study seeks to understand what teachers feel would support them in achieving this. Through the course of their interviews, most of the teachers identified specific resources or scaffolding which they perceived had helped or would help them to navigate the tensions. Sarah was able to list a number of these:

> *Interviewer:* *So what do you think are the things that are required in order to make those train tracks cross? What will it take?*
>
> *Sarah:* *Deliberate strategic approach… and policy where it's mandated that there has to be Attributes evident within every rubric, like there just has to be. And then in our reporting structures that we give to parents that the Attributes would be physically seen and reported on. Curriculum design, I mean you'd want to see the Attributes inside the design, like actually physically written on that course outline document, like they just … they need to be evident and seen, and that's, I guess a bit more professional development but also probably time, curriculum planning time to actually physically do that. I mean it's posters in a classroom, it's Attributes on the wall, it's flagpoles or coloured tile mosaics, or … like it's a presence that they don't yet have. Which they will in time, I'm certain of it, but it's just it's in its infancy at this stage, really.* (Sarah, 188-204)

Not only is Sarah expressing the importance of sustained and embedded strategies for development, but also the need for change to be scaffolded with concrete resources. Most teachers identified that resources and structures would assist them with what they believed was a need to be more "strategic" (Sarah, 19), "deliberate" (Sarah, 19; Renee, 32; Clare, 204), "purposeful" (Clare, 204), "explicit" (Rebecca, 85; Helen, 193; Michael, 33-38; John, 30) and intentional in aligning Christian ethos and their assessment practices. As Sarah stated above, these included policies, assessment rubrics, reporting structures and curriculum documents.

John spoke about the value of being able to provide teachers with specific strategies:

> *John:* *Because I think what I get from teachers a lot and one of the ways I've always been able to solve things in a faculty is, if I can come up with a strategy it's amazing how teachers will take it up. If you give them a strategy and say, "Hey, look this is something you can do in a classroom", and I think that's where the formative assessment stuff came in is when teachers just went, "Is that all I need to do? I can just take that into the classroom and … it's that simple".*
>
> *Interviewer:* *So it helps when there are strategies?*
>
> *John:* *Yes, so some strategies in how we might be able to set that up in a classroom; what it would look like. And there's various ways it could look but I think if teachers were able to be shown, that would support teachers and it would also allow teachers to be a little bit critical and go, "Okay, so you know, what we should be doing? How should we be setting classrooms up for this?"* (John, 754-778)

The teachers' desire for concrete resources and strategies aligns with Andersson and Palm's (2018) findings that when teachers are presented with concrete assessment resources that were useable in the classroom, they are more likely to both go on to develop their own new resources and also change their thinking and practices about assessment over time. The comments of the teachers also align with the views of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) that "collaborative professionalism" can only occur if teachers' learning is supported by tools and structures.

A number of respondents felt that the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* served as a useful resource and framework that helped to focus their thinking and practice, suggesting that the

continued use of this as a framework for developing a more holistic approach to learning and assessment would be helpful in a range of ways.

> *Interviewer:* *Do you think the Attributes help at all?*
> *Rebecca:* *Yeah. They definitely do because you can see a clear link between the Attributes and assessments.* (Rebecca, 347-349)

Specifically, respondents could see that the *Attributes* could assist them developing a greater consistency between ethos and practice.

> *I still think we've been a little bit compartmentalised in our approach which is why the Attributes are now becoming so valuable because it … you've got like your two train tracks and it makes them cross.* (Sarah, 186-187)

The *Attributes* were also seen as a useful tool to develop more holistic assessment practices.

> *Yeah, well I think that it's really easy to put those [the Attributes] in as assessment tasks, it made a lot of sense, so it wasn't like there was an issue or a tension, it was more like oh, it was more of an awareness going oh yeah, I'm actually looking for that critical thinking skill and trying to assess that.* (Helen, 183-187)

And, finally, the *Attributes* were perceived as user-friendly and easy to apply.

> *When we did the group activity which was with the Junior school, we took the book that we studied, which is 'Birrung the Secret Friend', and it was easy to match the Attributes with that, to find those values in those books and also to relate it to Scripture and Christ-like development.* (Julie, 114-119)

However, whilst the teachers found it relatively easy to connect the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* with assessment tasks, the lack of metrics to support the actual assessment of 'Christlikeness' or aspects of Christian ethos was seen as a significant hurdle:

> *Clare:* *I think sometimes as teachers we just tend to go in the, you know, academic direction, "This is the assessment, if you want an A this is what you need to do".*
> *Interviewer:* *Why do you think we do that?*
> *Clare:* *That's because that's what we can measure, I guess, a bit more than, you know, how kind someone is or how Christ-like somebody is.* (Clare, 280-288)

As documented in Section 5.2.2, leading up to and at the time of the interviews, the teachers had been engaged in collaboratively developing assessment rubrics that also incorporated the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes.* In both the feedback notes from the professional learning sessions as well as the participant interviews, some teachers mentioned that this development of rubrics provided a useful structure for looking at how they might be better aligning Christian ethos, assessment tasks and the curriculum and also for assessing aspects of ethos.

> *And I liked the idea from one of the PD sessions, I would think that the future would mean that we had a rubric for the assessment for Christ-like characteristics.* (Helen, 217-220)

The responses of both primary and secondary teachers in this study indicated an aligned viewpoint that rubrics would assist in both assessing ethos and ensuring consistency between teachers. Furthermore, Renee felt that "assessment structures give a scaffold to be able to bring values into an assessable format" (Renee, 40-42) and that these structures needed to be worked through by teaching teams. However, it was also noted that there needed to be a lot more discussion about and more time to develop rubrics and other assessment tools (Feedback notes from professional learning workshop, Jan 25, 2016). A comment by Julie also raised the question as to whether rubrics are, in fact, the most suitable way to measure the *Attributes* and the need perhaps for deeper thought around this.

> *There is a lot of emphasis on rubrics and a lot of talk about them, so I think we have to tailor-make our rubric or our guidance to, you know, what our expectations are in relation to the actual aspect that we're testing and so forth. Some [of the Attributes] would lend themselves to a rubric and others wouldn't, so I think that we need to determine those kinds of things.* (Julie, 326-333)

Linked to this, Chris also identified that structures for reporting were needed, though he was not sure what these should look like.

> *Reporting on it, I don't know, I guess we're … we need some sort of … you sort of need to know what sort of structure you're trying to aim for so that you can then make sure of your task and meet that aim. So I don't know how we report on it, I don't have a good answer for that one.* (Chris, 267-271)

As noted in Section 1.6.4, within the Christian school sector, practical models for assessing 'non-academic' domains are severely lacking. Despite the majority of Christian schools

espousing the importance of the development of values, character, a biblical worldview and a faith habitus, the literature suggests that there remains little practical scaffolding or models developed either within schools, by Christian school associations or through research which would support schools and teachers to do so. Oasis Christian College is not alone in grappling with how to assess and effectively report on student 'success' in these areas. In the American context, Schultz (2012) found that although many Christian schools identify in their mission statements that developing both a biblical worldview and academic excellence in students are their key goals, few actually report on their level of success in both areas. She cites a failure to "evaluate the effectiveness of school efforts to inculcate a comprehensive biblical worldview in their students, though it appears to be a nearly universal practice to evaluate the effectiveness of their academic efforts through standardized testing" (Schultz, 2012, p. 7). Schultz posits the lack of clarity around the definition of 'biblical worldview' as part of the problem and her study involved defining a multi-dimensional conception of worldview and then working towards the development of a tool to measure biblical worldview in Christian school students. This tool is something that Christian schools and Christian school associations in Australia could investigate to determine whether it might be suitable in the Australian context. At the very least, it could be a catalyst for the development of other tools that might meet the needs of Australian schools now and into the future. The Christian school associations could consider facilitating opportunities for teachers, leaders, researchers, theologians and other experts to work collaboratively towards this. The data in this study would indicate that teachers feel that practical models, resources and examples would assist them in better aligning Christian ethos and assessment practices but they would need "knowledgeable support" (Andersson & Palm, 2018) and time with their colleagues in order to develop them.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored what teachers at Oasis Christian College perceived might support them as they navigate their perceived tensions between Christian ethos and their assessment practices. As outlined in Chapter 5, early in the interviews, many of the teachers said that they did not know how to resolve these tensions. However, in responding to the interview questions, they began to articulate the need, both as an institution and as a collective of individuals, to hold up a mirror to the existing beliefs and attitudes about assessment at Oasis Christian College in order to address the outlined tensions. They were also able to identify professional learning strategies that they believed would help them to do this.

The data in this study highlights a need for teaching, learning and assessment at Oasis Christian College to be collectively reconceptualised in order to ensure a holistic rather than compartmentalised approach. The teachers felt strongly that the cultural identity of the school needed to be better articulated and understood and that both assessment practices and what is valued and celebrated within the school, needed to be better aligned with the College's core ethos and values. They felt that the *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* were a step towards this. The teachers understood that they would benefit from increasing their levels of both assessment and biblical literacy. They felt that when they had time and opportunity to work collaboratively on challenges within their context, complex issues such as navigating tensions between ethos and assessment practices could be resolved. They also agreed that external support, examples and concrete resources were key ingredients to this process.

As evidenced in this chapter, the respondents' views about the kind of professional learning which would support them aligns with the conceptualisation of professional learning as discussed in Section 2.1.1 which defines professional learning as:

- opportunities for teachers' beliefs, attitudes and understandings to be challenged in order to change their professional practice
- the development of both individual and collective capacity (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a).

The purpose of this chapter was to present and discuss the data in relation to how teachers at Oasis Christian College perceived that professional learning might assist them in navigating and resolving the tensions between the school's Christian ethos and assessment practices, thus answering the second research question. In the next and concluding chapter, the major claims of this research will be summarised, a model for conceptualising the problematic presented and the implications of this model for Oasis Christian College and for Christian education more broadly will be discussed. Recommendations for future research will be suggested and my own journey as a researcher reflected on.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study sought to explore two largely under-researched areas: professional learning in the Christian school context and the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices in the Christian school context. Whilst some literature that explores these areas does exist, I was not able to identify any Australian studies that specifically investigate the perspectives of teachers within the Christian school context.

This chapter presents the conclusion to this research study: *In the world but not of the world: Ethos, assessment and professional learning in the Christian school context*. In the first section of this chapter, a summary of the key findings in relation to the two research questions is presented. Following this, a model for conceptualising the key problematic identified by the research is presented thus providing a new theoretical tool to inform future professional learning endeavours. The implications of this model for professional learning at Oasis Christian College and for the Christian education sector more broadly are then discussed. This is followed by suggestions for further research arising from this thesis. This study's contributions to knowledge are then described and the chapter concludes with my own reflections on the doctoral journey.

7.1 Key Findings

The first research question in this study sought to understand participants' perspectives of the relationship between the espoused Christian ethos of Oasis Christian College and the reality of their assessment practices. The first research question was: *How do teachers in one Christian school describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?*

In this thesis, I have identified that the teachers' perspective of the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices at Oasis Christian College is one of tension. I conceptualise the teachers' experiences as a struggle between the privileging of different forms of capital within the field. Prevailing assessment practices privilege certain types of cultural capital to the disadvantage of the cultivation of spiritual resources and a faith habitus. There is also a tension between the perceived importance of economic capital and its provision and exchange in the field and the teachers' desire to fulfil the school's vision and mission regarding the fostering of faith habitus and the spiritual formation of students.

This thesis demonstrates that, whilst individual teachers in Christian schools may embody a faith habitus, it cannot be assumed that this is sufficient to resolve the binary that exists between Christian ethos and high stakes testing. Furthermore, given that assessment practices are so embedded and taken for granted by teachers, schools, parents and the education field more broadly, resolving this tension is not one that any individual Christian school teacher can do alone.

The second research question in this study sought to explore participants' perspectives regarding how professional learning might support them in negotiating the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices in the context of their school. The second research question was: *How do teachers in one Christian school perceive the value of various forms of professional learning in supporting them to navigate the relationship between the Christian ethos and assessment practices?*

The thesis points to the potential for professional learning to support teachers in resolving the tensions that they identified. The data suggest, in order for it to do so, this professional learning needs to be clearly focused on clear goals that develop both teachers' faith habitus and their assessment practices, it needs to be differentiated and highly collaborative. This study identified that professional learning needs to first create time and space for teachers to identify underpinning philosophies and conceptions of assessment. Tensions between Christian ethos and the worldview that informs high stakes testing need to be identified and acknowledged at both the institutional and individual levels. This can then facilitate new approaches, practices and the development of resources that will support teachers as they seek to employ 'mission-aligned' practices.

7.2 A Model for Conceptualising the Problematic

This central problematic of this thesis has been the exploration of how professional learning might support teachers as they navigate the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practice. The following model was developed by me as a way to bring together the conceptual and empirical elements of this study. The model outlines a theory in relation to the dynamics of assessment as a site of tension for Christian schools in order to inform future professional learning.

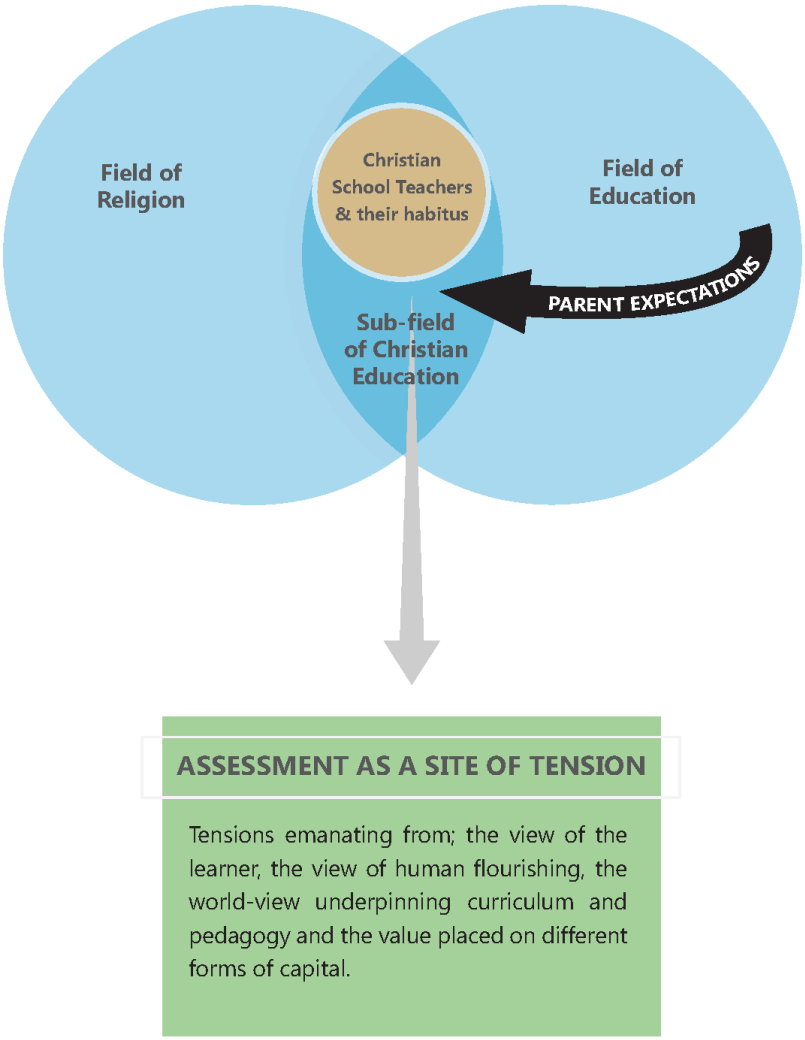

Figure 1 Christian Ethos and Assessment: Conceptualising the Problem

As Figure 1 shows, the sub-field of Christian education can be found at the intersection between two fields: the broader field of education and the field of religion. Teachers with their individual habituses, which have been shaped by both the field of education and their faith are also found at this intersection and, as this study has shown, they often struggle to navigate between the two fields. The intersection where the sub-field of Christian education and Christian school teachers exist, can be conceptualised as a site of tension, particularly in relation to assessment. Furthermore, parents are also habituated into the assessment paradigm of the broader education field and their expectations tend to reflect this, thus adding to the tension for teachers. As the model identifies, the tension in relation to assessment exists in four key areas: the underpinning view of the learner, beliefs regarding what constitutes human flourishing, approaches to curriculum and pedagogy and the value placed on various forms of capital. The usefulness of this model in conceptualising the problem lies in its value in

informing the implications for professional learning which can support in addressing the tensions. The following section outlines nine propositions for professional learning that are implied by the findings of this thesis and derived from the model.

7.3 Implications of the Findings

This thesis has provided insight into teacher perspectives regarding what would support them in navigating tensions between Christian ethos and assessment practice. However, the constraints of this study in terms of timeframe and resources, only allowed for this to be explored in the context of one Christian school. Furthermore, it was outside the scope of this study to actually test proposed solutions, which means that suggested implications are speculative and would need to be further evaluated in practice. Suggestions for how this might be done are taken up in the section following this one. None-the-less, this study has provided a valuable and important glimpse into the problematic along with recommendations in terms of how the tensions raised might be addressed through professional learning both at Oasis Christian College and more broadly across the Christian school sector. This section outlines those implications for professional learning practice.

Through the use of Bourdieu's tools, this study provides a new way of conceptualising the problematic explored which, in turn, creates the potential for new ways of addressing it. Figure 1 above illuminates the way in which Bourdieu's thinking tools have helped to conceptualise the problem explored through this research. Consideration of the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment in terms of field, capital and habitus provided a unique way to think about the nature of the tensions and why they exist. In turn, this gave rise to new ways of thinking about how professional learning might contribute to strengthening the integrity of Christian school practices.

Methodologically, this study used Bourdieu's concepts both analytically and theoretically and it has therefore contributed to the small body of existing Christian school research that has also drawn on Bourdieu. This study adds to both Grace (2002) and Angus's (1988) use of Bourdieu to theorise the field of Catholic education, as well as Green's (2009) study conducted in a Christian College in the United Kingdom. In particular, this study builds upon Green's conceptualization of faith habitus and also provides discussion and critique of the notion of 'spiritual capital' as outlined by Grace (2002, 2010), Verter (2003) and Baker and Skinner (2006).

Christian schools have an opportunity to lead the charge in equipping students to make a difference in society. However, this study seems to suggest that there exists the danger that Oasis Christian College may still be caught up in an outdated paradigm of education which continues to privilege content driven, individualised learning and "pays selective attention to a set of metrics which are limited" (Hannon, 2017, p. 30). This paradigm of education which seeks to 'sort and sift' students and prepare them for a future of wealth and consumption is not only oppositional to the biblical notion of human flourishing but also continues to be seriously questioned by progressive educational thinkers. As Lovat (2009) points out, "whole person learning requires a holistic approach to teaching on the part of teachers, schools and systems" (p. 4).

The following nine propositions in relation to professional learning are implied by my findings.

7.3.1 Adopt a "religio-critical" approach

It might be argued, for a school that wishes to remain registered and receive government funding, not all practices can be changed. The school is, after all, subject to the laws of the land and the regulations of the broader field. However, this does not mean that there should be blind or unthinking acceptance either. This study has affirmed the value and importance of firstly exposing the worldview assumptions of practices in order to critique and then look for ways to change thinking and practices. These worldview assumptions underpin the view of the learner, views around what it means to flourish as human, approaches to curriculum and pedagogy and the value placed on various forms of capital. Hull's (2003) contention is that Christian school educators need to engage in "paradigm warfare" if they are to close the gap between Christian school espoused vision and the reality of practices that he claims are essentially the same as those of secular schools. This study affirms that argument.

Stuart Fowler is credited with creating the phrase "religio-criticism" to describe the "interrogation of convictions about the source of order and meaning that underpin proposals or prescriptions for educational practice. These presuppositions are often unarticulated and must be made explicit if their impact is to be identified" (Fowler quoted in Blomberg, 2015, p. 863). In other words, rather than simply accepting the pre-suppositions and practices of the education field, Fowler is suggesting that the Christian school adopt an approach which

critiques the prevailing practices according to their worldview assumptions. Dickens (2013) summed this up clearly in the conclusion to his study:

> The current economic model of schooling where national competitiveness and individual success… predominate needs to be challenged. Christian educators need to be contributing to this challenge from their gospel informed perspective on life and creation. Rather than accepting the model, 'tinkering around the edges' or making it a safer, more sanitised version, Christian educators, informed by biblical anthropology, need to be providing alternate models of schooling that are driven by a holistic understanding of human dignity and purpose. (p. 252)

Not only do Christian educators need to "disentangle themselves from the reigning secular paradigm in education" (Hull, 2003, p. 217), they also need to fundamentally transform the way Christian schools operate. This would be akin to what Cuban (1988) refers to as "second-order changes" which he says "alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together. They reflect major dissatisfactions with present arrangements. Second-order changes introduce new goals, structures, and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems" (Cuban, 1988, p. 242). This process will require honest reflexivity on the part of Christian schools and individuals, will involve struggle and will need creativity and tenacity to navigate.

7.3.2 Address the binary between faith and learning

The issue of dualism within the Christian school sector where faith and learning are seen as separated, and which has been raised previous in Christian education literature (Berlach, 2002; Dickens, 2013; Green, 2017; Hill, 1989, 1997; Justins, 2009; Prior, 2017), was also highlighted as an issue in this study. Despite the goal of ensuring that Christian ethos informs all school practices, this study found a level of deficit at Oasis Christian College. This has been conceptualised as a struggle between opposing worldviews which undergird key school practices. However, this is something that Oasis Christian College, and the Christian education sector more broadly, can address through professional learning.

This could be done, for example, by engaging with the ideas of Murison (2018) or Beech and Beech (2018) to reconceptualise a more holistic approach to learning in Christian community. For example, instead of thinking about how a Christian ethos might be added to or integrated into the curriculum, the question of focus for teachers and students could become, 'How does

God reveal himself through this curriculum?' Instead of seeing academic learning and spiritual formation as two separate endeavours, Oasis Christian College could take the lead in working with experts to re-think the doxa of the Christian education field and have staff work collaboratively to apply new conceptualisations and theory to practice. In line with the conclusions drawn by Murison (2018), this study also proposes a commitment to the ongoing spiritual growth and formation of teachers as key to addressing this tension. Murison also suggests that changes need to be made to the language used around 'faith learning integration' and frameworks for conceptualising the revelatory classroom explored. In addition, he points out that this needs to be done collectively and collaboratively by the school community and new ways of thinking about education embedded in culture.

7.3.3 Support and foster the development of teachers' faith habitus

As the Figure 1 above suggests, teachers and their habitus sit within the intersection at the site of the tension thus contributing to the binary between ethos and practice. This study identified that teachers will struggle to critique the worldview assumptions of educational practices in the light of Christian ethos unless they are able to identify their own pre-suppositions, those which underpin the broader education field and those which underpin Christianity. Furthermore, if a biblical perspective is to permeate all curriculum and pedagogy, a level of biblical literacy is required. Consideration needs to be given to how the school can foster and develop the biblical literacy of teachers within the context of their work.

Although the teachers in this study stated that they 'did not know' how to resolve the tensions which they experienced between ethos and assessment practices, they did none-the-less feel confident that, if tackled collaboratively and with support, ways forward could be found. There exists an opportunity for Oasis Christian College to foster an environment where a "religio-critical" posture becomes second nature and the vision of Christian education authentically realised across all practices. In doing so, Oasis Christian College could become both an example and an inspiration for other Christian schools.

One model that could be drawn upon as a starting point is that of Lutheran Education Australia's (LEA) *Pathway* program which requires all teaching staff to complete comprehensive training in order to be accredited to teach in a Lutheran school. This is either completed pre-service, via arrangement through a number of tertiary providers or in-service, over time, commencing at induction. LEA's *Pathways* program seeks to provide "means and

opportunity for the professional theological pre-service and in-service education of teachers" (Lutheran Education Australia, 2019). This program is comprised of three elements:

- *Spiritual focus* which enables staff to reflect on why the Lutheran Church of Australia operates its schools, their own spirituality and how the spiritual focus of their school informs the education offered.
- *Theological focus* which provides the opportunity for staff to develop their knowledge of Lutheran theology and the way it informs Lutheran education so that they can better understand the ethos of the Lutheran school. It has a greater emphasis on specific theological content as it provides participants with the opportunity to explore Lutheran theology and how it is lived out in a Lutheran school.
- *Vocational focus* which provides staff with the opportunity to focus on the practice of Lutheran schooling and reflect on how they individually can contribute to the mission of the Lutheran school as they live out their vocation. (Lutheran Education Australia, 2010)

Christian Schools Australia, in conjunction with member schools and tertiary partners, could develop a similar, comprehensive program in which teachers participate within the school, supported by external experts. Requiring staff to engage in such intentional and targeted professional learning as part of their teaching contracts, along with the provision of time and resources to do so, could make a significant contribution to the development of teachers' faith habitus. In turn, a well-developed faith habitus would enable teachers to successfully address the kinds of tensions raised in this study.

7.3.4 Consider how the concept of a Christian community can be applied in practice to the learning of students

Section 1.5.3 of this study specifically outlines the notion of community as it applies to the Christian school context and the manner in which this biblically informed conceptualisation of community underpins Christian school ethos. However, the data in this study indicated that at least some of the learning and teaching practices at Oasis Christian College, and particularly those in relation to assessment, are predominantly focussed on a very individualistic approach which is more reflective of the capitalistic underpinnings of the broader education field. Many of the dominant assessment practices promote and foster competitiveness rather than learning in community. There is an opportunity for the school to reject this paradigm and work towards implementing assessment practices which reflect both the biblical notion of community as well as the increasing body of literature which highlights

the importance of the social context of learning (Delandshere, 2001; Elwood & Murphy, 2015; Fleer, 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018).

Whilst schools must still participate in high stakes testing regimes, there does exist the opportunity to de-emphasise rather than deify these. I recently had the opportunity to visit a school in the United States of America where I saw senior students in an Advanced Placement (AP) level economics course working collaboratively in pairs or small groups to complete an exam, the results of which counted towards their final year school graduation. The students were also able to have a page of notes with them whilst completing the exam. I witnessed students who were highly engaged as they debated, discussed and brainstormed problems – there was evidence of real learning occurring. Furthermore, the teacher reported that the process enabled him to get feedback on the areas that each student needed support in (by looking at the notes they chose to bring with them as well as listening to their discussions). Perhaps the most interesting outcome though, was that the teacher reported he had been monitoring the external AP exam results over the three years since he had commenced employing much more collaborative and flexible approaches to both learning and assessment in this class. He found that AP averages of his students had increased over time and, in addition, many more students were applying to do the course. What I take from this is that it is possible to operate 'in the system' but not be 'of it'. It is possible to step outside of the competitive 'success' paradigm critiqued in this thesis and yet still have students achieve success in final year high stakes testing. I have also witnessed other approaches in a Singapore school where the outcomes have been similar.

It would seem to me that creativity, risk taking and a willingness to step outside of the status quo are what Christian schools will require if they are to move assessment practices towards a more authentic expression of Christian community. In doing so, Christian schools have the opportunity to both respond to the changing face of society, the world of work and education as well as influence the broader field of education policy by setting an example of more innovative and effective practices. In order for Christian schools to honour the uniqueness and needs of each student as part of a community, teachers need time, opportunity and encouragement to question their practice and to trial and develop new approaches.

7.3.5 *Create time and opportunity for teachers to collaborate and reshape assessment practices*

The literature is clear that effective professional learning requires time but creating it is a challenge for most schools. The school will need to think creatively and outside of the current structural paradigms, especially at the secondary level, in order to provide meaningful opportunities for teachers to work together to reshape culture and practice. Consideration needs to be given to the way that time is currently used (e.g. on meetings) and possibly re-prioritise. The study suggests that a commitment to ensuring that timetables and other school structures serve rather than constrict learning of both students and teachers would also be of value. Consideration could also be given to whether/how teacher allocations could include time for professional learning communities and also the ways that non-teacher time could be used more strategically to free up teacher time.

7.3.6 *Review school rituals and practices*

In this study, and particularly during the professional learning workshops where notes and artefacts were collected, the teachers demonstrated capacity to imagine solutions to perceived tensions. What enabled this were expert input to stimulate thinking, time to reflect and discuss robustly with colleagues and the opportunity to contribute their ideas for change. During the time of this study, some of these ideas have been implemented by leadership. Findings from this study suggest that valuing this process should become a part of the culture, and that the school continue to provide time and space for teachers to engage in "religio-criticism" in relation to their everyday classroom practices in order to expose dichotomies outlined in Figure 1 and discover resolutions. Embedding the learning within the teachers' work will ensure that the focus is on student learning and that teachers have ownership of change (Borko et al., 2010; Fullan, 1998).

In line with the critique of assumptions and presuppositions underpinning its practices, the school would benefit from a review of its rituals and practices to ensure that these are consistent with its espoused Christian ethos regarding the view of the learner, the holistic nature of education, the notion of discipleship and the concept of biblical human flourishing. School rituals and practices should reflect the school's valued capital (and the way this is distributed) and its goal to foster spiritual resources amongst all community members. Particular attention could be given to:

- How student achievement is conceptualised and articulated.
- Biblical notions of success and excellence.

- Auditing of key documents, rituals and practices to identify underpinning messages about what is valued to ensure that these align with Christian ethos.
- Developing new practices and rituals which intentionally communicate and demonstrate Christian ethos.

7.3.7 Continue to build on the flourishing at Oasis attributes and foster the development of new resources, models and metrics for assessment

Traditional, high stakes testing regimes developed in line with what Bourdieu identified as the social reproductive goals of the field of education, have a significant influence over the sub-field of Christian education. Throughout this study, the teachers agreed that they would need to either access or develop, new strategies, concrete resources, structures and models which would support them to better align Christian ethos and assessment practices. The *Flourishing at Oasis Attributes* were seen as an example of this and the teachers spoke positively about them in terms of providing a way for them to consider learning and assessment practices from a biblical perspective. The teachers expressed value in scaffolding which would support them in collectively generating "assessment structures", "assessment tools" (such as rubrics) and new ways to report student progress. They spoke specifically about not knowing how to 'measure' Christ-likeness. The school could consider on drawing on expertise from outside of the organisation (such as the Christian school associations and Christian tertiary providers) in order to facilitate and support the further development and embedding of the framework as well as the development of new approaches, models and metrics for assessment by teachers at Oasis Christian College. In doing so, there would be benefit in drawing on previous work which has investigated ways to identify and measure 'non-academic' domains in the Christian school context (Bradfield, 2014; Fisher, 1998, 2004; Fisher et al., 2002; Francis et al., 2012; Schultz, 2012).

7.3.8 Strengthen parent partnership and communicate vision

As my theoretical model highlights, parent expectations are one of the intersecting elements which contribute to the perceived tensions between Christian ethos and assessment. This suggests the importance of maintaining the integrity of the school's vision before the parent community. The school could consider how it might strengthen its partnership with parents through intentional and proactive communication of the school's ethos, values and priorities. Providing opportunities for parents to be actively involved in shaping practices in line with this ethos may also be beneficial. Given that many parents do not share the Christian ethos of the school, strategic and ongoing parent education programs which establish a greater sense of

shared culture and priorities would be beneficial. In addition, consideration could be given to 'parent induction' at the time of initial enrolment as a proactive approach.

7.3.9 Further implications for Christian Schools Australia

Christian Schools Australia (the association of which Oasis Christian College is a member) cites its priorities as "Growing schools, growing teachers and leaders and curriculum and pedagogy" (Christian Schools Australia, 2012). This study, therefore, also has implications for CSA as they consider their role in the provision of professional learning opportunities, especially in supporting schools to develop their own in-house, embedded and focused professional learning strategies. Christian Schools Australia may also be able to assist with developing new models for organising school structures in order to create time for professional learning.

As pointed out in Section 2.1.4, the *Christian Distinctive National Professional Standards for Teachers*, produced by CSA, are designed to complement and sit alongside the AITSL *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and "articulate the distinctive aspects of policy and professional practice associated with Christian education" (Christian Schools Australia, 2012). However, these standards are completely silent on *Standard 5: Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning*. It is recommended that the Association revisit this document and put further thought into the expectations of Christian teachers in Christian schools with regard to assessment practices. Doing so would also require articulation of a clear, Bible-based philosophy to underpin these standards. Furthermore, there is scope for Christian Schools Australia to engage its member schools in broader conversations around new approaches, models and metrics for assessment.

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This study gives rise to a number of ways in which the findings of this study might be expanded and its implications evaluated through further research. A key question arising from this research is, if the suggestions outlined in this chapter were adopted, how would their effectiveness be evaluated? How could the narrowing of the binary between Christian ethos and assessment as a result of the suggested interventions be tracked?

One way would be for Oasis Christian College to implement the suggested approaches to professional learning and then repeat this study and see whether there had been any change in teacher perspective. Similarly, this study could be conducted on a greater scale across a

number of schools to determine what other teacher perspectives might inform both the binary and how it might be addressed.

Research studies could also focus on other members of the Christian school community. The perspectives of Christian school students in relation to assessment practices and the impact of these practices in shaping their identity as learners could be investigated. Research into parent perspectives of Christian schooling and how schools might better engage parents in the vision and ethos of the school, particularly when many families are not themselves members of a faith community, could also be beneficial.

The reviewed literature, supported by comments made by the teachers in this study, suggests that assessment practices in the Christian school context are often no different to those in a secular school. Further studies could seek to develop new approaches and models for assessment practices that stem from Christian ethos. For example, a study which explores how the Christian education approaches of "revelatory classroom" (Murison, 2018) and "integrality" (Beech & Beech, 2018) (as opposed to *faith learning integration*) might be operationalised in school practices would be beneficial. In addition, other key aspects of Christian school practice could be investigated to see how well they align with Christian ethos.

7.5 Researcher Reflections

I remember early on in my doctoral journey one of my supervisors saying to me, "Doing a thesis changes you". I now understand what she means. The process of completing this thesis has changed the way that I perceive and approach my work and has caused me to think more deeply about Christian education in general, and assessment practices in particular. In addition, the process has given me new insights into the education process itself and the implications for school students.

At the commencement of my candidature I was not entirely sure that I 'had what it took' to undertake such a project. I wondered whether I could last the distance and at different stages of the journey I had times where I wondered whether I would be able to overcome the intellectual challenges that I faced. However, now at the end of the journey, though most definitely a novice, I believe that I have begun to develop a 'researcher habitus'. The thinking and skills that I have had to learn and employ in order to write my thesis have begun to spill over into my work to the point that I now find myself dissatisfied with anything less than a

robust and systematic, researched-based approach to solving problems or making decisions. Possibly my colleagues have found my continual questions such as, “What does the research say about this?” a bit tedious but it seems that more thorough investigations are now becoming the culture with our leadership team. Furthermore, midway through my thesis, I was offered a new position in my organisation with part of my brief being to oversee research for the organisation. This is a unique role for a school and is a sign of new approaches to leadership in our context.

Whilst reading other people’s research papers as well as books about how to do research played some part in the development of my researcher habitus, the key influences have been the feedback from and conversations with my supervisors. Listening to their conversations (often with each other) and their advice has, over time, shaped the way that I think, what I believe about education and my practices both as a student researcher and as an educational leader. In addition, I now have greater desire and confidence to engage with other experienced researchers and enjoy learning from and being challenged by their work.

As an educator, I have navigated the field of education successfully and managed to accumulate some cultural capital along the way. The types of knowledge, skills and assessment regimes privileged by the education system were the type that I could negotiate. However, the process of completing a doctorate has given me new insights into what it is like for those young people who struggle within the schooling system. Many times over the past few years I have struggled with the requirements of this project and with tasks that were previously unfamiliar. Consequently, I developed a greater empathy for those students who sit in class and feel a sense of inadequacy. It did not take me long to realise that what was happening was that I was actually engaged in *learning*. Authentic learning that involved struggle, frustration, failure, incremental steps forward and which required significant perseverance. Perhaps for the first time in my formal education, I was engaged in a learning process that would not stop until I had mastery (or gave up). Many students in school do not have this opportunity, but rather have a small window of time for learning after which they are tested and then required to move on to something new, even when their learning is not complete. In addition, many students who achieve academic ‘success’ do not actually get the opportunity to engage in an authentic learning process. Learning is so much more than just a cognitive process – it involves the whole person - senses, feelings, beliefs, values, dispositions. Mastery is so much more powerful, rewarding and motivating when it involves struggle and failure to get there, but many school students do not get to experience this.

Hence, the doctoral process has further highlighted to me the kinds of learning opportunities we need to provide for students and has made me even more determined to continue to work towards an overhaul of the prevailing, antiquated paradigm of school education which really does not serve anyone well. I am particularly passionate about working towards this end at Oasis Christian College and in the Christian schooling sector more broadly.

7.6 Concluding Comment

This study has sought to explore how professional learning of teachers might strengthen the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practices in the context of one Christian school. In doing so, the teachers' perspectives and habitus as well as their practices were revealed and analysed. As a researcher, the process of engaging with the literature and analysing the data through a new and unfamiliar lens served also to reveal my habitus and highlighted the dichotomies in my own thinking and practice as a Christian educator. As the study progressed, I became acutely aware of the importance of reflecting critically on the presuppositions and worldview that underpin my own thinking and practice. Like some of the teachers in this study, I also became aware of the need to further develop my own faith habitus in order to be equipped to tackle the complex challenges in Christian education.

Though Bourdieu's various studies showed that education tends to reproduce social inequality, he none-the-less understood education's potential for social change (Webb et al., 2002). This study has served to "make explicit the forms of misrecognized symbolic power (i.e. *doxa*)" (Grenfell, 2014, p. 117 italics in original) or unquestioned shared beliefs that underpin assessment practices at Oasis Christian College. However, the impacts of field and habitus and the social reproduction of education as revealed in this study are not fixed. At Oasis Christian College, and more broadly across the Christian school sector, there exists the opportunity to change the field towards more equitable and holistic outcomes for students. Such changes will require high levels of reflection, thought, intentionality, collaboration and planning. This is the ultimate challenge that this thesis presents to Christian schools – to question those practices which are often unquestioned and to commit to the development and adoption of new ways of thinking and practice that are more closely aligned with espoused Christian ethos.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

Principal Investigator: Prof Kristina Love
Student Researcher: Maria Varlet [HDR student)
Ethics Register Number: 2015-273E
Project Title: Professional Learning and Biblical Ethos in the Christian School Context
Risk Level: Low Risk
Date Approved: 17/11/2015
Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2016

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

The data collection of your project has received ethical clearance but the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process and approval is subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that outstanding permission letters are obtained, interview/survey questions, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur. Failure to provide outstanding documents to the ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. Further, this approval is only valid as long as approved procedures are followed.

If your project is a Clinical Trial, you are required to register it in a publicly accessible trials registry prior to enrolment of the first participant (e.g. Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry http://www.anzctr.org.au/) as a condition of ethics approval.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Researchers who fail to submit a progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed a progress/final report form must be submitted. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:
1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the HREC by submitting a Modification/Change to Protocol Form prior to the research commencing or continuing. http://research.acu.edu.au/researcher-support/integrity-and-ethics/
3. Progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis.

http://research.acu.edu.au/researcher-support/integrity-and-ethics/

4. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

5. Protocols can be extended for a maximum of five (5) years after which a new application must be submitted. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,

Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Dr Nadia Crittenden

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University

Appendix 2: Head of College Consent Form

HEAD OF COLLEGE CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Professional Development and Biblical Ethos in the Christian School context

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Kristina Love

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Maria Varlet

I consent to the following:	**Yes**	**No**
• I offer general approval for my College to be involved in this research study.	☐	☐
• I agree for the student researcher to share the outcomes of the research project with teachers and school leaders.	☐	☐
• I agree that relevant information regarding this project will be provided to the teachers and school leaders from me via email.	☐	☐
• I understand that data provided by the teachers and school leaders at my College may be used by the researchers in future research projects.	☐	☐
• I understand that given the relatively small size of respondents in the school, the researchers cannot guarantee that they can maintain complete anonymity of participants if or when providing direct quotes; however if the researchers think this might occur, the teachers and school leaders will be contacted to check if they are comfortable with their quotes being used in the report.	☐	☐
• I understand that the data collected during the study may be used in academic publications and/or conference presentations.	☐	☐
• I understand that a) involvement in this project is voluntary; b) the teachers and school leaders can withdraw from the study at any time; and c) the teachers and school leaders can ask to have any unprocessed identifiable data that was supplied previously be withdrawn without explanation and without any negative consequences.	☐	☐
• I understand that the foreseen risk from the teachers' and school leaders' participation in this research study is minimal.	☐	☐
• I understand that in signing this consent form I have not waived any of my legal rights as a research study participant.	☐	☐
• I understand that once signed, this consent form will be retained by the researcher.	☐	☐

It has been requested of me that the teachers and school leaders at my College participate in the research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent that willing and relevant teachers volunteer for this project, knowing that they can withdraw their involvement, and any associated data, at any time.

Name of Principal or Designee: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Information Letter to Participants

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER - Teachers

PROJECT TITLE: Biblical Ethos and Professional Learning in the Christian School Context
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Kristina Love
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Maria Varlet
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Participant,

As a teacher at Hillcrest Christian College, you are invited to participate in the research project described below, which has been approved by the Head of College. Please read this information letter in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research.

What is the project about?
The research project investigates how professional learning strategies can support teachers to employ teaching, learning and assessment practices which are congruent with the vision and ethos of Christian schools. The researcher will focus on teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding assessment as a critical aspect of professional practice and how these perceptions about assessment are navigated through their professional learning. In particular, the research will explore how the perceptions and beliefs of teachers might differ, if at all, at the key stages of schooling (Years 3/5/7/9/12). The research will be guided by two key questions:

1. How do teachers in one Christian school describe the relationship between the school's Christian ethos and their assessment practices?

2. How do teachers in a Christian school perceive the value of various forms of professional learning in supporting them to navigate/resolve tensions in relation to the alignment of Christian ethos and assessment practices?

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Maria Varlet under the supervision of Professor Kristina Love. This project will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
There are no significant potential risks for the teachers and school leaders who participate in this project apart from potential mild discomfort of participation in Interviews or Focus group and imposition on teachers' time. Participation (or not) will be kept confidential and refusal to participate will not jeopardise relationships with the researcher.

What will I be asked to do?

There are two ways that **teachers** may volunteer to participate in this research:

1. **Consent to the use of workshop notes and artefacts developed by teams in professional learning activities**
   You will be asked to give your consent for notes, feedback, curriculum documents and assessment rubrics developed by your faculty team during College based professional

learning workshops, to be used as part of the data to be collected and analysed in the study.

2. Individual semi-structured interviews

Teachers will be invited to participate in two Interviews of 30 minutes duration. One will be early in Term 1 and the other during Term 3. Participants will be asked to talk about their experiences in professional learning related to the development of assessment rubrics. By conducting 2 rounds of interviews with an interval of time in between, the researcher will be able to track any changes or developments in teacher experiences and thinking. These interviews will be audio recorded, and the transcriptions will be provided to participants to check.

The interviews will take place at the participants' workplace in a space provided by the Head of College.

What are the benefits of the research project?

There are no significant immediate benefits to the participants in this research although their engagement in professional reflective conversations may contribute to their own thinking and practice. It is anticipated that this project will have potential benefit for the case school by providing a vehicle to explore how the school might shape its professional learning going forward. More broadly, it is hoped that the development of theory around professional learning principles which effectively support teachers to navigate tensions around assessment in this school, will contribute to debate and discussion more broadly within the Christian schooling sector.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. Teachers' decision to participate (or not) will be kept confidential. Refusal of participation or withdrawal will not jeopardise your relationships with the researchers in any way.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

All information collected prior to the commencement of the study, and for the entire duration of the research will remain confidential and secure. Presentation of key findings will be published in a Thesis, Journal article, Conference and a Report to the College. Data will be reported in de-identified form. The research report will not be linked to any particular individual or to the school.

The participants in this study will be provided with pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of their data. However, given the relatively small size of respondents, we cannot guarantee that we can maintain complete anonymity of participant's data if or when providing direct quotes. If we think this might occur, we will contact teachers and school leaders to check if they are comfortable with us using their quotes in our report. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. The researchers will take reasonable steps to destroy or permanently de-identify personal or school information if it is no longer needed for any purpose.

All collected data (consent forms, artefacts and responses) will be securely stored on password-protected computers and locked filing cabinets for a minimum of five years from the completion of the study at the Australian Catholic University with access restricted to members of the research team.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?
The teachers and school leaders may contact the researchers to request the outcome of the research study and results. A copy of the project report will be provided to the Head of College.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
Participants can contact the researchers via email at mcvarl001@myacu.edu.au to ask questions about this project.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2015-273E). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Chair, HREC
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY, VIC, 3065
Ph: 03 9953 3150
Fax: 03 9953 3315
Email: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?
If you agree to participate in this study please sign both copies of the consent form and return the researcher copy to the Personal Assistant of the Head of College.
Yours sincerely,

Professor Kristina Love
Australian Catholic University

Maria Varlet
Student Researcher

Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form (All Teachers)

CONSENT FORM – All Teachers

TITLE OF PROJECT: Professional Development and Biblical Ethos in the Christian School context

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Kristina Love

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Maria Varlet

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information letter. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that the workshop notes (summary notes and team reflections) and artefacts (assessment rubrics) developed by my team during professional learning workshops in 2016 be made available to the researcher in order to be analysed in relation to key themes around the integration of biblical ethos into assessment practices. I do this realising that I can withdraw my consent and the use of workshop notes and artefacts which were developed by me in conjunction with my team, at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....

SIGNATURE..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR.....

DATE:……..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....

DATE:.....……

Appendix 5: Consent Form (Teacher Interviews)

CONSENT FORM – Teacher Interviews

TITLE OF PROJECT: Professional Development and Biblical Ethos in the Christian School context

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Kristina Love

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Maria Varlet

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in a 30-40 minute individual interview early in Term 1, 2016. I understand that these interviews will be digitally recorded and realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....

SIGNATURE .....DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR .....

DATE:……..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: .....

DATE:.....…….

Appendix 6: Email from Head of College to teachers inviting them to participate in the research

20th January, 2016

Dear Teaching Staff

As a College we receive numerous requests to participate in research projects. Each request is carefully considered and from time to time the College chooses to participate in those projects which it deems will be of benefit to both the College and the broader educational community. As professionals it is important for us to both conduct and be involved in research which will serve to foster improvement.

As many of you are aware, Maria Varlet is currently undertaking doctoral studies. Her investigation is focused on the nature of professional learning in the Christian school context and, in particular, how this is aligned with biblical ethos. This is highly significant not just for our school, but also for the Christian education sector more broadly. For this reason, as Head of College, I have agreed that she may conduct her research on our campus. All doctoral research projects are subject to rigorous ethical and methodological scrutiny and Maria's research proposal has the appropriate approval from the Australian Catholic University where she is enrolled.

Your involvement in this research project is, of course, totally voluntary. However, I would encourage you to consider participating. Your participation has the potential to contribute new understandings for our sector but it can also be a great source of personal professional learning as well.

There are three possible ways to participate in this research:

1. All teachers will be asked to give consent for group notes and artefacts created during professional learning and faculty workshops to be used. This will not involve any imposition on teacher time, just consent to use feedback notes and resource materials created by teams. A consent form will be provided to all staff on Monday.
2. Individual teacher interviews
3. School leader Focus Group

Please find attached two information letters which provide further information about the research project. The two letters are very similar but one is specifically designed for teaching staff, the other for school leaders (and some of you fall into both categories).

If you would like to be involved in either the individual interviews or the focus group, please advise my Personal Assistant via email by **Monday 1st February.**

The list of names will then be forwarded to Maria and she will liaise with you directly regarding the details.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to chat with me or directly with Maria.

Regards

Head of College

Appendix 7: Interview Prompts (Quotes from earlier professional learning activities)

Assessment

What is assessed and reported doesn't necessarily align with the College is promoting as biblical human flourishing

The College is focused on celebrating high achievement and 'winners' but not the student who improves their grades or achieves a personal best in sport

Students are being defined by their grades

The College is producing competitive students who are focused on individual achievement

Grades put the focus back onto the individual – how do you shift that to a culture where every student wants the whole class to achieve.

Awards

Awards given to students are too narrow and too often focused on academic achievement based on marks

Integrating the Attributes

The big one for us was assessment. We couldn't really come to a conclusion as to how we could truly measure or assess creativity.

The pressure is more so to complete the curriculum, rather than allowing the students to be creative. There is no time for creativity because of the 'busyness' of things and the timeframe in which to complete the curriculum.

In subjects like Science and Humanities we can see that the subject lends itself to being creative and the students being inquisitive, however there are other subjects that don't.

Is it possible to have a goal for top marks and be creative at the same time and achieve the same?

The key challenge presented was revolved around the question of how we measure and assess these Attributes at different levels without overloading what we are already doing.

How do these Attributes align with the Australian Curriculum?

The team considered several of the competencies to relate batter to subjects that were thematic in nature. Rational nature of Mathematics with clear right and wrong made these Attributes difficult to apply.

How do we ensure that we don't overload the unit with Attributes?

Appendix 8: Interview Questions

Initial interview questions

1. The College mission statement of Oasis Christian College states that "the gospel message is an integral part of all we do". What does that mean for you?

2. In your view, what are the key goals of assessment in the Christian school context?

3. In thinking about the professional learning that you engaged in during Term 1 (provide reminders):

a) What tensions or questions, if any, arose for you personally or for the group during these sessions?

b) Have you been able to negotiate and resolve these? If so, how?

4. What factors do you believe help/hinder the development of your assessment practices, particularly in relation to the integration of Christian ethos?

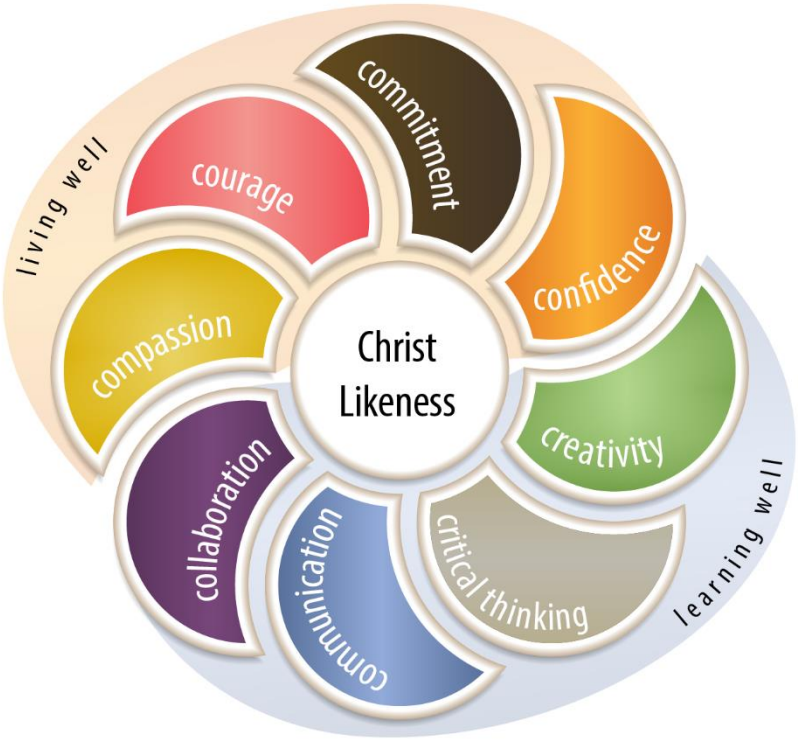
Interview Questions - Final

Questions	**Purpose**
1. The College mission statement of HCC states that "the gospel message is an integral part of all we do". What does that mean for you?	This question enabled an initial exploration of individual teacher habitus (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, dispositions and cultural capital) and how these align (or not) with the professed College ethos.
2. In your view, what are the key goals of assessment in the Christian school context?	This question intends to explore teachers' underpinning beliefs and values (habitus) in regards to assessment and how/whether these connect to/align with Christian ethos. This question has the potential to reveal whether teachers, in their discourse, are compartmentalising what they value in relation to assessment and Christian ethos, thus highlighting the site of tension.
3. How well do you feel that Christian ethos and College goals are reflected in the College's current assessment and reporting practices?	This question sought to build on the feedback already collected and bring further clarity around areas of tension experienced by the teachers.
4. What factors do you believe help/hinder the development of your assessment practices, particularly in relation to the integration of Christian ethos?	This question aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of what strategies (such as professional learning) might support them in the development of assessment practices that integrate and align with Christian ethos.

Appendix 9: Flourishing at Oasis Attributes

Attributes of Human Flourishing

Living well and learning well



The key to human flourishing is Christlikeness

The willingness to live a life of loving, knowing, and growing to be like Christ

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
2 Peter 3:18

We love God
We love and serve others
We are growing in our faith
We find our identity in Christ

Creativity

Our endeavours reflect the creative flair of our Creator

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
Ephesians 2:10

We are able to imaginatively generate ideas and to apply them in practice

We are innovative thinkers

We do and make creative things for the delight and benefit of others

Critical Thinking

The ability to analyze information and ideas and to form reasoned arguments and judgments

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good
1 Thessalonians 5:21

We can reflect on our own thinking

We can analyse wisely and make sound judgements

We can transfer knowledge and understanding into new contexts

We can solve problems and influence change

Communication

The ability to humbly and effectively express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently in a range of media and forms

The mouth of a righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just
Psalm 37:30

We communicate with grace, humility and respect

We use a variety of forms to communicate effectively in ways that

contribute to the flourishing of others

We can communicate with a range of audiences for different purposes

We listen actively to others

Collaboration

The ability to work with others in respectful and constructive ways

There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12

We are respectful and understanding of others

We listen actively to others

We learn and work as a team

We demonstrate self-control

Compassion

The ability to appreciate the innate worth of others, empathize with them and willingly show God's mercy

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves
Philippians 2:3-4

We show empathy and kindness toward others

We go out of our way to put the needs of others first

We use our time and resources to serve others like Jesus did

We show kindness and generosity as they are fruits of the spirit

Courage

The ability and willingness to act rightly and selflessly in the face of uncertainty and fear

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.
1 Corinthians 16:13

We are brave and willing to take risks

We persevere through trials and obstacles

We stand up for and do what is right and fair and speak out against injustice

We conduct ourselves with humility

Commitment

The ability to be personally responsible, faithful to others and engage constructively in activities and causes

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord.
Colossians 3:23

We are true to our word

We display personal responsibility and integrity

We work with effort, diligence, and perseverance

We seek to honour God with our gifts

Confidence

The ability and willingness to live confidently, authentically, and wisely

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
Philippians 4:13

We are purposeful and aspirational

We are self-directed learners

We are emotionally intelligent

We are secure in our identity and seek to use our gifts to enrich society

We recognise our own capabilities and confidently request guidance when required

Appendix 10: Interview Summary Sample

Renee – we assess what we teach

When asked about the College vision statement, Renee started by talking about how it shaped her view of the learner as well as impacted her own personal conduct and teaching. She spoke about being deliberate and building a gospel message into the subjects she teaches.

Renee spoke about the inherent difficulty in "assessing for faith" and that although the school is "working towards" it, there are presently not a lot of "actual Christian values in assessment processes" [lines 61-62]. Rather, the focus is on assessing subject content and knowledge with a priority on the Australian Curriculum.

Renee agreed that assessment and reporting at the College did not align well with the College's view of biblical human flourishing but felt that there were attempts to celebrate improvement and not just achievement.

Renee said she did try to communicate to her VCE students that "there's more to life than just one score" [line 184] but went on to say that as a teacher she felt that she was "held to account for my students' scores" [line 201] and that her teaching was "defined" by how well her students did on the exam.

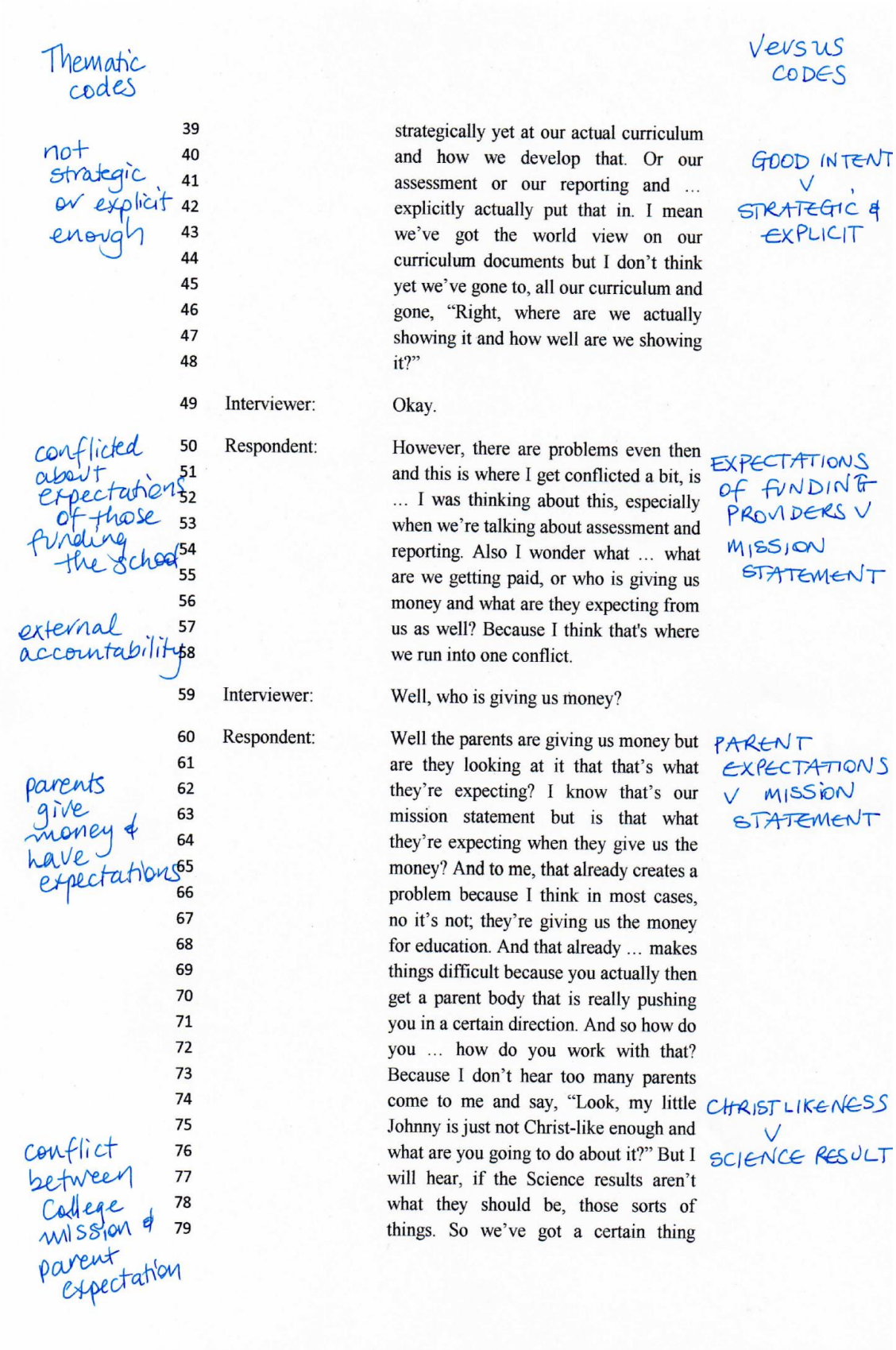
She expressed difficulty in reconciling the "outside assessment system" of VCE to College values despite the fact that earlier she had suggested that the statistical moderation of SATS was an example of how the class was somehow working together rather than competing against one another. Renee felt this "disconnect" also existed in the lower year levels.

Renee asserted that "you assess what you teach" [line 226] therefore addressing the perceived disconnect would require further work on the curriculum and "more deliberate structuring" of assessment tasks.

The keys to achieving this would be a lot of discussion and the provision of structures for teachers. She felt that it was a matter of somehow lining up the Australian Curriculum/VCE with the Attributes but without creating any extra workload.

When asked if she had any further thoughts to add to the conversation, Renee responded that "teachers need to change their mindset on what assessment actually is" [lines 309-310] and that this would require much "time" and "space" because the shift in thinking is significant.

Appendix 11: Coding Sample



		strategically yet at our actual curriculum and how we develop that. Or our assessment or our reporting and … explicitly actually put that in. I mean we've got the world view on our curriculum documents but I don't think yet we've gone to, all our curriculum and gone, "Right, where are we actually showing it and how well are we showing it?"
	Interviewer:	Okay.
	Respondent:	However, there are problems even then and this is where I get conflicted a bit, is … I was thinking about this, especially when we're talking about assessment and reporting. Also I wonder what … what are we getting paid, or who is giving us money and what are they expecting from us as well? Because I think that's where we run into one conflict.
	Interviewer:	Well, who is giving us money?
	Respondent:	Well the parents are giving us money but are they looking at it that that's what they're expecting? I know that's our mission statement but is that what they're expecting when they give us the money? And to me, that already creates a problem because I think in most cases, no it's not; they're giving us the money for education. And that already … makes things difficult because you actually then get a parent body that is really pushing you in a certain direction. And so how do you … how do you work with that? Because I don't hear too many parents come to me and say, "Look, my little Johnny is just not Christ-like enough and what are you going to do about it?" But I will hear, if the Science results aren't what they should be, those sorts of things. So we've got a certain thing